THE WAY OF THE STRONG

RIDGWELL CULLUM

45

A Merry Xmas

To

Lucien

From

Alice

12/25/22

THE WAY OF THE STRONG

THE MUZZLE OF A REVOLVER WAS COVERING HIM

THE WAY OF THE STRONG

By RIDGWELL CULLUM

Author of "The Twins of Suffering Creek," "The Night Riders," "The One Way Trail," Etc.

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THE WAY OF THE STRONG

PART I

CHAPTER I

ON SIXTY-MILE CREEK

It was a grim, gray day; a day which plainly told of the passing of late fall across the border line of the fierce northern winter. Six inches of snow had fallen during the night, and the leaden overcast of the sky threatened many more inches yet to fall.

Five great sled dogs crouched in their harness, with quarters tucked under them and forelegs outspread. They were waiting the long familiar command to "mush"; an order they had not heard since the previous winter.

Their brief summer leisure had passed, lost beneath the white pall which told of weary toil awaiting them in the immediate future. Unlike the humans with whom they were associated, however, the coming winter held no terrors for them. It was the normal condition under which the sled dog performed its life's work.

The load on the sled was nearing completion. The tough-looking, keen-eyed man bestowed his chattels with a care and skill which told of long experience, and a profound knowledge of the country through which he had to travel. Silently he passed back and forth between the sled and the weather-battered shelter which had been his home for more than three years. His moccasined feet gave out no sound; his voice was silent under the purpose which occupied all his thought. He was leaving the desert heart of the Yukon to face the perils of the winter trail. He was about to embark for the storm-riven shores of the Alaskan coast.

A young woman stood silently by, watching his labors with

the voiceless interest of those who live the drear life of silent places. Her interest was consuming, as her handsome brown eyes told. Her strong, young heart was full of a profound envy; and a sort of despairing longing came near to filling her eyes with unaccustomed tears. The terrors of this man's journey would have been small enough for her if only she could get out of this wilderness of desolation to which she had willingly condemned herself.

Her heart ached, and her despair grew as she watched. But she knew only too well that her limitless prison was of her own seeking, as was her sharing of the sordid lot of the man she had elected to follow. More than that she knew that the sentence she had passed upon herself carried with it the terror of coming motherhood in the midst of this desolate world, far from the reach of help, far from the companionship of her sex.

At last the man paused, surveying his work. He tested the raw-hide bonds which held his load; he glanced at the space still left clear in the sled, with measuring eye, and stood raking at his beard with powerful, unclean fingers. It was this pause that drove the woman's crowding feelings to sudden speech.

"Heavens, how I wish I were going with you, Tug!" she cried.

The man lifted his sharp eyes questioningly.

"Do you, Audie?" he said, in a metallic voice, in which there was no softening. Then he shook his head. "It'll be a hell of a trip. Guess I'd change places with you readily enough."

"You would?" the girl laughed mirthlessly. "You're going down with a big 'wad' of gold to—to a land of—plenty. Oh, God, how I hate this wilderness!"

The man called Tug surveyed her for a moment with eyes long since hardened by the merciless struggle of the cruel Yukon world. Then he shook his head.

"It sounds good when you put it that way. But there's miles to go before I reach the 'land of plenty.'" He laughed shortly. "I've got to face the winter trail, and we all know what that means. And more than that. I'm packing a sick man with me, and I've got to keep him *warm* the whole way. It's a guess, and a poor one, if he don't die by the way.

That's why I'm going. Say, he's my partner, and I've got to get him through." He laughed again. "Oh, it's not sentiment. He's useful to me, and so I want to save him if I can."

Tug's manner was something like the coldly rugged view of the distant peaks which marked the horizon on every hand. The girl watching his sturdy figure, with its powerful head and hard, set face, understood something of this. She understood that he was something in the nature of a product of that harsh, snow-bound world. He was strong, and she knew it; and strength appealed to her. It was the only thing that was worth while in such a country.

"You can't save Charlie," she said decidedly. "They tell you you can't get consumption in this country—but, well, I'd say you can get everything that makes life hell. He's got it; and a chill on the way will add pneumonia to his trouble, and then——" She made a significant gesture.

"Maybe you're right," Tug admitted. Then he shrugged, and, moving over to one of the dogs, busy chewing its rawhide harness, kicked it brutally. "Anyway he's got to take his chance, same as we all have."

The girl sighed.

"Yes." She was thinking of herself. "When do you start?"

The man looked at the sky. Then he glanced down at the land sloping away to the distant banks of a creek, which in a less monstrous country would have borne the prouder denomination of "river."

"When your Leo comes up to help me pack Charlie into the sled. Say, isn't that him coming along up now?" he added, shading his eyes. "This snow's got me dazzled for a bit."

The girl peered out over the white world. It was an impressive view. Far as the eye could see a great ring of gray-crested hills spread out, their slopes massed with patches of forest, and the gleaming beds of ancient glaciers. Just now the cold of coming winter held pride of place, and the dark woodlands were crowned with the feathery whiteness of newly fallen snow. But though impressive the outlook was unyielding in its severity, and the girl shuddered and, for relief, was glad to return to speech.

"Yes; he's coming along up."

Tug watched the distant figure for some thoughtful moments.

"He's a great feller," he said at last. But there was no real appreciation in his tone. Then he laughed. "I should say he'd need to be a great feller to get a good-looker girl to come right along up to this devil's playground with him."

Audie's troubled eyes softened.

"He's a great fellow," she said simply.

Tug laughed again.

"I s'pose that's why they call him 'Leo.' Guess most fellers' nicknames have a meaning suggested by their characters. Leo-Lion. Maybe they're right. I'd sooner call him 'Bull.'"

"Why?"

Audie was interested. Yet she understood there was no sympathy, and little enough friendliness in this hard, cynical man.

"Just his way of tackling life." Tug watched the great figure as it came slowly up the slope. His eyes were keen, shrewd, speculative.

"He does tackle it," agreed Audie warmly.

"Yes. He gets right out to meet things. He's a fighter. I'd say he's a born 'kicker.' He doesn't fancy the things that come easy. He's after a big piece of money, but"—he laughed—"he don't want it easy. That's where we're different. It seems to me there's enough weakness in the world for a man to live on, and there's surely enough money for the overflow to dribble into your pockets, if you only hold them open right. That's my way; but it's not his. Say," he quizzically surveyed the girl's flushed face, "guess you'd follow him to hell—if he asked you?"

Audie shrugged her handsome shoulders, but her eyes were soft.

"I've followed him here, which is the cold edition of it. I don't guess I'd need persuading to get up against the warmer side."

"No. But it's taking life hard."

"Guess we have to take life hard sometimes. It's mostly the way of things. Life comes by degrees. And you can't help any of it. Three years ago I was acting in a New York

theater, getting a hundred dollars a week salary. I wore beautiful clothes. I had heaps of friends, men and women. I lived on the best, and never knew what it was to cook a meal, or do a chore. Two years ago I was 'barnstorming' at Dawson in—well, they call it a theater. Now—now I am here."

"With a man we call 'Leo.'" Tug studied the girl's beautiful face, her superb figure, that would not be denied even under the coarse clothing she was wearing. She did not appeal to him as a woman. She was too pronounced a type. There was a decided boldness about her. Even her beauty was aggressive. But he was sufficiently observant to be interested in the woman's reason lying behind her actions.

"And why not?" demanded Audie, with a quick flash of her big eyes.

Tug smiled coldly.

"Just so. Why not?"

"Maybe I haven't given up as much as you might think." Audie's eyes were intently fixed upon the approaching figure. They were alight with the fires of passion. "Leo is bound to make good. He can't fail. That's the man. He would win out under any circumstances."

Tug nodded.

"Sure. By fair means or——"

"He'll win out," cried Audie sharply.

Tug's broad shoulders lifted indifferently.

"Sure. He'll win out."

It was not the man's tone; it was not the man's words; it was his manner that made Audie long to strike him. His cynical expression was infuriating as he moved off to meet the approaching Leo.

Audie watched him go with brooding, resentful eyes. She saw the two meet, and, in a moment, the sun broke through the clouds of her anger. How could it be otherwise when she beheld the contrast between the men, which so much favored her Leo. A wave of pride thrilled her. In face and form, as well as character, her man was something of a god to her.

They came towards her, Leo moving with an active, swinging stride, while the other moved with the almost cat-

like stealth which the use of moccasins ever gives their wearer. Leo was a large man in the early stages of manhood. He was twenty-five years of age, but, from the unusual cast of his rugged features and the steady light in his keen gray eyes set beneath shaggy, tawny brows, he might well have borne the burden of another ten. It was a wonderful face. Such a face as rarely fails to appeal to a woman of Audie's type. As Tug had said, he was a fighter; and the fact was written largely in every line of his features. It was the face of a man of passionate resolve; a man who would not be denied in anything he undertook. Nor was it a harsh face. His eyes looked out with an utter fearlessness, but there was a gleam in their depths which baffled. Whether that latent fire was inspired by good or evil it would have been impossible to tell. Perhaps it was the memory of that strange light which had inspired Tug's doubt.

For the rest his physique was large and extremely powerful. He wore a close, curling fair beard which accentuated the thrust of his square chin, and from beneath his slouch hat flowed the mane of waving hair which had originally inspired his nickname.

The woman only had eyes for Leo as they came up to the sled, and for the time at least all her troubles and regrets were forgotten. She had no words to offer. She was content to be a silent witness. The affairs of life in such desperate regions must be left in men's hands, her woman's sphere extended only to the inside of their squalid home.

She watched Leo pass a critical eye over the sled. Then his deep voice expressed his approval.

"You've fixed things neat," he said, without great interest. Then his eyes settled upon the stout canvas bag lashed securely on the forepart of the sled, and his whole expression instantly changed.

The change was as curious as it was sudden. All unconcern had passed, and his eyes shone with a deep fire which told of some straining emotion stirred in the depths of his soul. He pointed at the bag. Nor was his hand quite steady.

"That's a great 'wad,' " he said. Then, half to himself, "a dandy 'wad.' "

"Yes." Tug gazed thoughtfully at the parcel of gold,

which represented the result of his and his partner's years of isolation in the white wilderness of the north. "It's a goodish 'wad,'" he agreed with satisfaction.

The bigger man was lost in a profound contemplation of the gold that was his quest also. For a moment or two neither spoke. Then Leo withdrew his gaze with a sigh, and turned to the waiting woman.

"Here, catch!" he cried. He pitched a seven-pound trout, which he had just taken from the creek, across to her. "It'll make dinner," he added. "Guess we'll not get many more. The creek'll be solid ice in a week." Then he abruptly moved up towards Tug's hut. "You best get things fixed, and I'll bring Charlie out."

Leo's manner had become all unconcerned again. These two men were about to pass out of his life. The fact of their existence, their coming or going, had very little real interest for him. They did not influence his concerns one iota. But Tug left the sled and followed him.

Tug was the first to reappear from the hut. He was clad for the long trail, and bore in his arms the pile of furs with which to shut out the deadly breath of winter from the body of his sick partner. Behind him came Leo carrying the attenuated body of the sufferer as easily as he might have carried a baby.

He deposited his burden in the sled, and looked on while the other buried the sick man beneath the warmth-giving furs. At last all was in readiness and Tug stood up. His whip was in one hand, and his gee-pole in the other. He was ready to "mush" his waiting team on.

"You'll only make the head of the Shawnee Trail, to-night," Leo said in his confident way, after a narrow inspection of the overcast sky. "You're going to get snow—bad."

"We'll camp there—if we do," replied Tug cheerfully. "If we don't—we'll make Mt. Craven, and shelter in the woods."

Leo shook his head.

"You'll only make the head of the Shawnee." Leo bent over the sick man to wish him good-bye. "So long," came the weak response from amidst the furs. Tug swung out his whip and the dogs stood up alert.

"So long, folks," he cried. Then he glanced round at the woman with a grin. "Guess I'm off to that land of plenty, Audie."

The jest on his lips became a heartless challenge under which the girl perceptibly winced. But even if her wit had served her to retort, she was given no chance. It was Leo who took him up with a quickness of understanding almost surprising; and though his manner was quite without heat there was a subtle, underlying bite in his reply.

"You've got to travel more miles than one to get there," he said. "So long."

Tug laughed without any enjoyment.

"I'd say this country's a hell of a piece—from anywhere," he retorted.

He turned at once and shouted at his dogs.

"Ho, you, Husky! Demon! You, too, Pinto! Mush, you devils! Mush on!"

The dogs responded on the instant. They strained at their harness, and promptly leaped into a swift run, bearing the laden sled away in a dense flurry of soft snow.

Leo and Audie looked after the departing outfit, until the speeding sled reached the foot of the long slope and disappeared behind a snow-laden scrub of undergrowth. Then the man stirred.

"It's getting near food," he said, in a matter-of-fact tone.

But Audie gave no sign of hearing him. Her face was turned away. She was still turned in the direction of the vanished sled. Her eyes were crowded with tears, and all the old longing and terror were upon her again.

"Audie!"

The summons came without any softening. The man's only answer was a deep, choking sob. Leo turned at once; neither was there any sign of impatience in his voice as he questioned her.

"What are you crying for?"

The sound of his question broke the spell of the woman's overwrought feelings. She choked down her sobs and her tearful eyes smiled round upon him, although her cheeks were still wet.

"Because I'm a fool. Because I've always been a fool, and—always shall be."

Leo half smiled and shook his head.

"We're never fools when we think we are," he said calmly. "The truth lies in the reverse."

Audie sighed. Again the corners of her pretty mouth drooped, and her brows drew ominously together.

"I—I was thinking of—of the places where he's going to. I was thinking of the—the good time he'll have. I was—oh, I was thinking of the winter that's coming to us here and—and of what I've got to——"

The man drew a deep breath, and something like a shadow crossed his strong features. His gaze wandered away towards the creek, where for so long he had been laboring to lay the foundations of that wonderful structure of success he purposed to achieve.

"You're scared," he said deliberately, at last. "You're scared to have your baby up here—alone." Then his eyes came back to her. "Guess I can't blame you—no one could. We—didn't reckon on this." He waited for a moment. "What do you want me to do?" he asked at last.

For a brief moment the girl's big eyes brightened with hope. But the moment passed, and tears again fell upon her soft, round cheeks.

"Do? Oh, Leo, I—I want to go where there's light, and—and hope. I—I want to go where there's help for me." She shuddered. "Yes, I'm scared. I'm terrified. But it—it isn't only that. It's—oh, I don't want our baby to be born in this awful country. Think—think of its little eyes opening on—on this wilderness. Besides——"

She broke off, her tearful eyes filled with doubt.

"Besides—what?"

There was no denying the directness of this man's mind.

"It—it doesn't matter. I——"

"But it does."

Audie had stopped to pick up the fish; but she left it where it was. She understood the uselessness of further denial. She had long ago learned her lesson. This man, young as he was, was utterly different to all the men she had ever met. Sometimes she was afraid of him; sometimes she would have given worlds never to have set eyes on him.

But always she knew that somehow her fate was linked with his; and above all she knew that she loved him, and under no circumstances would she have had it otherwise.

His love for her she never considered—she dared not consider it. In the remote recesses of her woman's soul, recesses hidden so well that even she, herself, rarely visited them, recesses the contemplation of which filled her with dread and trepidation, she held the hideous truth that his regard for her was incomparable with the devotion she yielded to him. But even with this subtle conviction, with this painful truth ever vibrant in her happiest moments, she was woman enough to be able to thank her God that she was permitted to live on the fringe of his life, his only companion in the rough hut which was their home. She would have him just as he was—yes, a thousand times sooner than yield up the love she bore him.

She knew now that a crisis in their lives had arrived. She knew that she had gone too far to retreat. Therefore she took her courage in both her hands.

"It's—it's the baby," she cried haltingly. "He—oh, yes, he, I am sure it will be a boy—will—will have no father, if—if he is born up here."

It was out. She could get no further; and she stood clasping her hands to steady the trembling she had no power to check.

The verdict of this man, whom she looked to as the arbiter of her fate, was slow in coming. With each passing moment her apprehension grew till she longed to cry out at the torture of the suspense. He was thinking earnestly, swiftly. He knew that she had confronted him with a problem that might well change his whole future. Therefore he considered without haste, without the least emotion.

At last his keen eyes turned upon her up-turned face, and what she beheld there warned her of the calm judgment he had brought to bear.

"Yes," he said thoughtfully. "And," he went on, after a moment, "maybe he'd have no mother either."

For a moment puzzlement was added to the woman's trouble.

"You mean——?"

Again Audie broke off. A sudden understanding had

come. His point of view was wholly in another direction from hers. He was not thinking of their moral obligations towards the little, unborn life. He was thinking of her; of what the unassisted birth in these outlands might mean for her.

She was startled. Then a rush of feeling swept over her that would not be denied.

"I—I wasn't thinking so much of—of myself," she cried eagerly. "I meant——"

"I know," he interrupted her. "You meant we are not married."

"Yes, yes. That's it." She came to him and seized one of his strong hands in both of hers, and her eyes were pleading up into his. "Oh, Leo, don't you understand what it means to him? Won't you? I never thought of it before. How should I? All I wanted in the world was to be with you. All I wanted was to be your devoted companion. That's why I—I made you bring me up here. Yes. I know. I made you bring me. You didn't want to. I knew then, as I have always known, as I know now, that—that I was merely a passing fancy to you. But I did not care. I believed I could make you love me. I blinded myself utterly, purposely, because I loved you. But now I realize something else. I realize there is another life to be considered. A life that is part of us. It is that which appalls me. Now I see the terrible consequences of my folly, to remedy which I must add to your burden, or give up forever all the happiness that has been mine since I knew you. Oh, Leo, I cannot bring a bastard into the world. Think of it. The terrible shame for the boy—for his mother. Don't you see? Give our little one a father, and never as long as I live will I cross your path, or make any claim on you. You can let the memory of my love lose itself amid all the great schemes that fill your thoughts. All I want, all I hope for is that you may go on to the success which you desire more than all things in life, and may God ever prosper you."

The man released his hand deliberately, but without roughness. The calculating brain was still undisturbed by the self-sacrifice of the girl. He had solved the problem to his own satisfaction, through the only method he understood.

"You don't need to worry yourself, Audie," he said, in

his blunt way. "The boy—if he's a boy—shall have a father. And I don't guess you need to cut yourself out of my life. We'll start down this day week. You've got to face the winter trail, but that can't be helped. We'll get Si-wash's dogs. He's a good scout, and knows the trail well. He'll take us down."

The woman's face had suddenly flooded with a radiant happiness, the sight of which caused the man to turn away. In a moment her thankfulness broke out, spasmodic, disjointed, but from the depths of her simple soul.

"You mean that?" she cried. "You mean—oh, may God bless every moment of your life, Leo! Oh, thank God—thank God!"

She suddenly buried her face in her hands, and tears of joy and happiness streamed down her cheeks.

Leo waited for her emotion to pass. He stood gazing out down at the creek. His eyes shone with that peculiar fire which in unguarded moments would not be denied. Then after a few moments the sound of sobs died down, and the man turned.

There was a marked change in him. The fire in his eyes was deep and somber. Audie, glancing into his face, knew that he was deeply stirred. She knew that for the first time in her companionship with him the restraint that was always his had been relaxed. The soul of the man had risen superior to the domination of his will.

"Listen to me, Audie," he cried, in a voice grown suddenly thick with an emotion she had never before witnessed in him. "You said you knew you were merely a passing fancy to me. That's not quite true. It's true I never calculated to marry you. But I liked you. I don't suppose I loved you in the way you would have me love you. No, I liked you, because—you are a woman. Just a woman full of all the extraordinary follies of which some of your sex are capable, but—a woman. It's difficult, but I must tell you. I've always known that the time would come when we must have a straight talk. I have no real love to give to any woman. My whole mind and body are absorbed in another direction, which is utterly opposed to all sentiment. What shall I call it? Ambition? It's scarcely the word. It's more than that. It's a passion." His eyes shone with deep feeling.

"A passion that's greater than any love man ever gave to woman.

"Yes, all my life I've fostered it," he went on abstractedly, "from away back in the days of early boyhood. God knows where I got it from. My father and mother were respectable, dozy, middle-class folks in New England, without a thought beyond the doings of their little town. They had no ambition. Their life drove me frantic. I must get out and do. I must take my place in the battle of life, and win my way to the forefront among the ranks of our country's millionaires. That is the passionate dream of my life which I intend to achieve. That is the wild ambition that has eaten into my very bones. It is part of me. It is me. It is a driving force which I have created in myself—and now it is beyond my control. I am the slave of my self-created passion, as surely as any drug fiend is a slave to the wiles of his torturer. I could not defy its will if I desired to. But I do not desire to. Do you understand me? Do you understand when I say I have no love to give to any woman? I am eaten up with this passion which leaves no room in mind or heart for any other.

"Maybe you think me a heartless brute," he continued after a moment's pause, "without feeling, or sympathy. Perhaps you're right. Maybe I am. I don't know. Nor do I care. I doubt if you can possibly understand me. I don't understand myself. All I know is, nothing I can remove will ever stand in the way of my achievement. I have no real scruples, and I want you to know all this now—now with our whole futures lying before us. This problem is not as difficult as you seem to think. There is no particular reason why I should not marry you. On the contrary there is every reason why I should. I have had a good year, so good that it might astonish you if you knew the amount of gold I have taken out of the creek. We shall go down to the coast with twice the amount Tug possesses. Tug never knew how well I was doing."

He smiled faintly.

"However," he hastened on, "my plan had been to leave here next spring, to avoid the winter journey, that was all. There will be no work done all the coming winter. So what does it matter if we make the journey six months

earlier? It will help you, and does not hurt me. So—don't worry yourself any more about it, but just make your preparations for departure this day week."

The man's usual calm had returned by the time he finished speaking. He had settled the matter in his own way, and his manner left nothing more to be said.

Audie understood. Her eyes were alight with a rapturous joy and devotion, but she realized how little he desired the outburst of gratitude she was longing to pour into his unwilling ears. In spite of the coldness with which he had told her he could never love her, this was probably the happiest moment of her life. She held herself tightly and strove to speak in the same calm manner he had used at the last.

"Thank you, Leo," she said simply. Then she added with an emotion that would not be denied, "I pray God to bless you."

Leo nodded.

"Right ho!" he said coldly. Then he picked up the trout. "Guess we'll get food."

CHAPTER II

THE ROOF OF THE NORTHERN WORLD

Si-wash was a great scout; he was also an Indian of independence and decision, both qualities very necessary in the snow-bound country such as he lived in. But Si-wash understood men very well; particularly the curiously assorted samples of whitemen who sought the remoteness of the Yukon in those early days when the news of its wealth was only just beginning to percolate through to civilized countries. It was for this reason he was as putty in the hands of the man Leo.

When consulted Si-wash protested against Leo's contemplated journey over the winter trail to the coast, especially with the added burden of a white woman. He drew a picture of every difficulty and danger his fertile brain could imagine, and laid it before the cold eyes of the big man. Encouraged by the silence with which his stories were

received he finally threw an added decision in his definite refusal to hire his dogs, and conduct the party over the perilous road.

Then Leo rose from his seat on the floor of Si-wash's hut, and invited him to visit his workings on the creek bank. Si-wash went, glad that he had been able to dissuade this man who possessed such cold eyes, and so unsmiling a face.

At the creek Leo spoke quite seriously.

"Si-wash," he said, as they stood beside the frozen, snow-laden stream, "I am disappointed in you. I have brought you here to show you your grave. There it is—under the ice. If you don't hire yourself and dogs to me, if you don't accompany us to the coast, I'll drown you in the water under that ice, where it's so cold that all the fires of hell, where your spirit will surely go, will never be able to thaw you out, though you remain there forever, as you undoubtedly will."

Si-wash both liked and feared Leo. But he hated cold water, in fact water of any sort, and feared talk of hell still more; so there was no further discussion. Si-wash accepted his money in advance; and, nearly a month later, the travelers were scaling the perilous heights of the watershed which is really the roof of the northern world.

Once foot is set on the long winter trail, all rest of mind and body is left behind. Days and nights, alike, become one long nightmare of unease. Every hour of the day carries its threat of danger. Every foot of the way is beset by shoals for the feet of the unwary. And the night—the long northern night—is a painful dream crowded with exaggerated pictures of dangers so narrowly escaped during waking, and vivid suggestions of added terrors which the morning light may reveal.

It is called the Shawnee Trail; vain enough appellation. There is no trail; there never has been a trail; nor will there ever be a trail, so long as the northern winter holds its fierce sway in due season. It is just a trackless wilderness, claiming thoroughfare by reason of the impassability of the rest of the country in that region.

There is no room for life in such a world, for there is no rest or relief. Existence is an endless struggle against the overwhelming odds of an outlaw nature. The great white land is broken and torn. It rises and falls, or plunges

precipitately in the manner of a storm-swept ocean; but ever the journeyer is borne upward, ever upward, to the barren crests of the watershed which dominate the melancholy spectacle of Nature's wasted endeavor.

For the most it is a silent land; nor is there movement to break the awesome stillness, unless it be the frequent presence of storm. Otherwise the calm is like the silence of the grave, without a whisper to waken the echoes of the riven, age-worn crags, or a movement to stir the hidden valleys into a seeming of life. It is the stillness of outer darkness, lit only by a wintry sheen, like the death-cold stare of wide, unseeing eyes.

Such thoughts and feelings stirred the woman traipsing easily over the smoothly pressed snow-track left by the laden sled. She moved with the curious swing of the snow-shoer, leisurely, comfortably. The gee-pole in her hand was an unnecessary equipment, for her path was fully tested by those who understood far better than she the dangers of the road before them.

Audie's eyes were looking out ahead at the men and the dogs. She knew she had no other responsibility than to keep pace. For the rest she knew that the burden of their journey rested on shoulders more capable of bearing it. So her mind was given up to thoughts which could never enter the men's heads. And those thoughts were full of the unutterable desolation of this untamed world.

Si-wash headed the dogs. A great incline of smooth, soft snow mounted up to the crotch of a great hill, where twin peaks rose sharply, towering above, and a wide pathway was left between them. It was a beacon of the trail, marking one of the roughest stretches yet to be traveled. Beyond this, five miles further on, the scout had marked a camping ground.

Just now he was a little anxious in his silent Indian way, and the sign of it was in his furtive watchfulness, as he peered from the road to the burnished light of the despondent sun.

Leo, swinging along beside the sled, was quite unaware of his guide's unease. The monotony of progress left him free to think whithersoever his active brain listed. For the time it led him on, on into dreams of the future, a future

than which he could imagine no other. His fortune, or that which stood for the foundations of it, lay strapped at the tail of the sled, and the knowledge of its presence, the sight of its canvas wrapping stirred him to a gladness which no monotony of the long trail could diminish. For him this was the moment of passing, when the foundations had been carefully laid and the first scaffold pole was about to be set in place round the structure of fortune he intended to build.

The harsh voice of Si-wash struck unpleasantly on his ears.

"Look!" he cried, pointing at the drooping sun with a mitted hand. "It the be-damn sun-dogs. Him look, an' look lak hell. Him much be-damn sun-dogs."

The man's irritability seemed quite uncalled for. The sun was shining over the still world with its usual coppery splendor; a gleaming ball of ruddy fire centering a wide halo of brilliant light, which, in its turn, was studded with four magnificent jewels of light—the fiercely burning sun-dogs which Si-wash so bitterly cursed. But Leo understood the full significance of what he beheld. He, too, felt inclined to curse those ominous wardens of the ineffective northern sun.

"Storm," he said, as he came up beside the Indian.

"We camp. Five miles," said Si-wash presently. "Five mile, long piece. Yes. Storm, him come quick."

The men moved on in silence, side by side. Audie had heard their talk. She, too, had looked across at the stormy sun, but she had no comment to add.

They were nearing the summit of the hill. The laboring dogs moved with heads low, and lean quarters tucked well beneath them. Their pace was the same as ever, only their effort was greater. With each moment the gap came down towards them, and, at last, they trod the shoulder under foot. Then Si-wash's sharp command rang out, and the five great burden bearers of the north dropped in their traces, and sought their well-earned rest on the feathery softness of untrodden snow.

The men surveyed the view from the great height at which they stood.

For long moments no word was spoken. Then the Indian held up a warning hand.

"See, hark!"

A curious sigh, almost as if the great hill were shivering under the biting cold of the atmosphere, seemed to drift out upon the sparkling air. It died away, somewhere in the distance behind them.

Then Si-wash spoke again.

"We camp quick." He pointed away out at the far side of the valley confronting them. "We mak dat valley. See dat hill? We come so. We mak round it. It bad. So. Long, deep fall. Dogs haul 'em long side hill. Very bad. So we mak 'em before storm. Good. After hill mush wood. Tall, big. It is we camp."

Without waiting for reply he turned to the dogs.

"Ho, you damn huskies. Mush!"

In a moment the dogs leaped at their traces, and the journey went on.

The end of the passage came quickly; and, as it did so, and the scout took the first step of the descent, another sigh, longer drawn out this time, sharper, a sigh that spoke of restless discontent, shuddered down the mountain side and passed on ahead of them. A moment later a tiny eddy of snow was caught up in its path and vanished amidst the sparkling air particles glistening in the sun.

Again the Indian's voice broke the silence. But this time it was to urge the dogs faster. He had said it was five miles to where they could camp in safety; and five miles, with a storm coming on, was, as he said, a "long piece."

But since the second breath had swept down the hillside a change seemed to have come over the aspect of the day. It was subtle. It was almost indescribable. Yet it was evident. It may have been that the air had warmed by a few degrees; it may have been that the sun's labored light had diminished. Certainly there was an added grayness settling upon the icy world. Yes. Something had certainly changed in the outlook, and it was a change which threatened, and told of the dread storm to come.

The dogs raced down the long hillside under the urgent commands of the Indian. A mile, one out of five to be accomplished, was devoured by scurrying feet. Then came the first real challenge of the storm. It was a swift, fierce blast which swept after them, as though enraged at the

attempt to escape. In wanton riot it sent a dense flurry of snow like a fog whistling about them, and, for the moment, blotted out all view of the goal Si-wash had set for himself.

The men had no words, but their thoughts were sufficiently in common. The swift-rising storm had banished every other consideration from their minds. Audie closed up on the sled, and her action spoke for itself.

Another blast rushed at the speeding travelers. It came across them. For a moment it seemed to pause in its rush as though it had reached the object of its attack. It swung round in a fierce whirl, round and round in growing fierceness, picking up the snow and bearing it aloft in a gray fog, like fine white sand. It dashed it in the faces of the men, it beat fiercely upon the thick coats of the racing dogs, it swept it under the fur hood of the woman, and painfully whipped the soft flesh of her cheeks.

The hiss of its voice was not allowed to die out. Reinforcements rushed to its aid. They came with a long-drawn moaning howl sweeping down from the distant hill, now grown vague and shadowy behind them, and added to the rapidly growing fog.

Harshly above the howl of the storm Si-wash's voice shouted into Leo's ear.

"The gar-damn blizzard. It hell!"

But Leo made no response. He had no answer for anybody. All his mind was centered upon the goal he longed for. Just now the woodland bluff, Si-wash had spoken of, seemed the most desirable thing in the world. He was not thinking of life or death. They were considerations that never troubled him. He was thinking of what the wrecking of their transport might mean to him.

Si-wash, being only a half-civilized savage, was thinking of those things which did not trouble his white companion; and, being simply human, he thought of the woman, the burden of whose presence he had deplored.

He turned and shouted at her to come up abreast of them, fearing a stumble might mean death to her in the storm; and in the same breath, the same tone, he hurled a string of blasphemous commands at his dogs.

Almost blinded by the whipping snow, Audie staggered to the side of the Indian. So cruel was the buffeting of the

storm she would have fallen, but for the timely succor of the man's outstretched hands. Already the downward rush was left behind, and the level of the valley was under their feet. Ahead of them, lost in the gray of the storm lay the incline which was to lead them to the treacherous shoulder of the hill they had yet to pass. Neither dogs nor men could see it, and their only guidance was the wonderful instinct of the savage brain of the Indian.

With unerring judgment he led the way, faltering not even for a second in his decisions; and soon, far sooner than seemed possible, the tautened traces, and crouching gait of the dogs, told that his judgment had not erred. The ascent had begun.

The steady pull went on for an hour; a grinding, weary labor in which every inch of the way was only accomplished under the cruel lashing of a merciless wind, and with eyes more than half blinded by the powdered snow. The wind seemed to attack them from every side; now from ahead; now from behind. Now it whistled down the hillside on their right; now it came up with a vicious scream from the depths of the canyon which dropped away beside them on the left of the harsh, hummocky path. The heavy wrappings of furs about their mouths were a mass of ice from the frozen moisture of their hard breathing, while the dense hoar-frost on their lashes had to be wiped away lest their lids froze together as their watering eyes blinked under the force of the wind. It was such a journey as matched the sterile land through which they were passing; such a journey as only the hardened folk of the northern world could dare to face.

At last the ascent was accomplished, and with the relaxing of effort came the first warning of the dangers with which they were surrounded.

It was the horror-stricken cry of the woman. In the blinding snow she had approached the edge of the path too nearly. Her feet shot from under her, and, for a moment, absolute destruction threatened. Again came the prompt succor of the Indian. Again he clutched her, and held her. Then he gathered his strength for an effort, and the next moment she was sprawling in safety at the feet of her lover.

"Ho, you damn-fool woman!" Si-wash cried, in a manner

that merely expressed his own fears, and had no insult in it

Leo helped Audie to her feet. A moment later his deep voice shouted above the howling of the wind.

"If she can fall, what about the sled?"

The Indian's reply was full of the philosophy of his race.

"Sure," he cried. "It easy."

The whiteman's next act spoke far more than any words could tell. He dropped back to the tail of the sled to guard his precious possessions. His first, his only consideration amidst the perils of that road was his gold. The woman bearing the burden of her devotion to him, must fight for herself.

Each passing moment brought added perils. The path up here was shorn of its loose covering of snow, swept away to the depths below by the all-mastering gale. The surface left was little better than a sheet of glare ice, hummocky and studded with roughnesses caused by broken ice frozen upon its surface. The snowshoes of the travelers left them fairly secure from slipping, but the wretched dogs had no such help. They fought for foothold till their weary feet were left torn and bleeding.

But the hill was passed and the track was no longer an ascent, and at this altitude the snow fog had lightened to gray mist which left the Indian less troubled. His silent blasphemy against the powers that ruled the storm ebbed gently. Its flood had passed. That was his way. The wall on his right was a sure guide, and at the end of it lay the haven where he hoped to eat and sleep. So long as he could see he had no fear whatsoever of the country to which he was born.

But with all this confidence the dangers were no less. The track sloped perilously towards the edge of the precipice on the left. It narrowed, too, so that there was no room for more than two people abreast. Leo understood these things, as only a man can whose mind is beset with dread for the safety of his possessions. Therefore there was something fierce and threatening in his sudden shout at the man who was leading the dogs. There was something else in it, too. There was a terrible fear, which sounded strangely in a man of his strength of purpose.

"Stop! Curse you, stop the dogs!" he cried wildly.

The shout brought the dogs to a stand, and the Indian dropped back.

"What is?" he demanded. But he needed no answer.

The tail of the sled was at the very brink of the precipice, supported only by the thrust of Leo's gee-pole, to which he clung with all the strength of his great body.

The Indian and the woman flung themselves to the rescue, and, in a few moments, the sled was resting safely at the inner side of the path. Then the Indian, as though imparting pleasant intelligence, assured his comrade.

"It more skid, bimeby," he observed confidently. "It worse—bimeby," he added, turning again to the dogs. "Mush on, you devils!" he cried. "Maybe we freeze."

There was no longer any ease of mind for the whiteman. Time and again the sled skidded, and each time he saved it from destruction only by inches. That stretch of level became a nightmare to him, and only the passionate endeavor of his labor made his nervous tension bearable. His pole was at work every foot of the way, guiding, staying, holding that incessant skid.

So they struggled on, floundering their way yard by yard, the dumb burden bearers fighting for a foothold at every step. It almost seemed as if they, too, understood their own danger from the skid, and were driven by their apprehension to unaccustomed efforts. They tore at the unyielding surface of ice with claws broken and bleeding, and, by sheer tenacity, ground out a purchase.

The drop to the woodland valley below was nearing. Si-wash called a warning to the man behind.

"We near come by end," he shouted. "Then him go down lak hell."

With this brief information the whiteman had to be content, for Si-wash promptly returned to his dogs, and finally took his place at the head of the sled. Presently the sled jolted. It tilted forward as the leading dogs of the team vanished down the slope. Then, in a moment, the run began.

The change came all too suddenly. The sled gained a furious impetus. Leo dashed forward to thrust a brake at its head. Si-wash was already there with his pole thrust deep in the snow. The two men joined forces, and, for a moment, the pace was steadied.

Then something happened. It was disaster; the worst disaster that could have befallen at such a moment. Leo's pole, strained possibly by the work it had already done, bent. It cracked; and broke off short. In a moment he was left behind sprawling in the snow. Before Si-wash could readjust his pole to the center of the nose of the sled the vehicle swung out stern first. It swept on at a great speed, and the dogs raced to keep out of its way. In another moment its impetus carried it to the brink of the precipice. It swept on, half poised in mid-air. Then, with a clatter and scrunch, it fell over the side, almost sweeping the heavy dogs from their feet.

It was a desperate situation. The straining dogs held for the moment by reason of their great weight, and in that moment the Indian and the woman were able to reach them and throw their own weight into the balance. Even then it was a desperate uncertainty. Could they hold it? Could they recover the fallen vehicle carrying such an enormous weight? But the problem solved itself in its own way. Just as the great figure of Leo loomed up on the scene of the disaster, the strain on the traces slackened, and the dogs were left standing still. There was no longer need to struggle.

Si-wash rose from the ground and released his hold.

"Wot is't?" he asked, in a stupid way.

Leo was leaning over the edge of the precipice, gazing down with eyes that strained to behold the safety of that which he most prized in all the world. He made no answer.

Si-wash came to his side. He dropped upon his stomach and peered down at the gray depths beneath. For a long while he was silent. Then, at last, as his companion stirred, he spoke in the curiously indifferent manner of his kind.

"The pack. Him haf gone. Him drop long way."

Leo was on his feet before he had finished speaking. He turned away and looked out into the gray fog. Presently he glanced down at the man beside him. Then his eyes rested on the dogs. Audie, watching him, saw a strained, dreadful expression growing in his eyes. There was a subtle fire lighting them; a fire she dreaded to look upon.

Then he began to speak. And as he spoke a wild, untamed, impotent fury swept through his head, sweeping away

all thought, all reason. Words, foul, blasphemous, raving, leaped to his tongue and found expression. He cursed the Indian; he cursed the woman, the dogs, the sled. He cursed the storm and the country. He cursed furiously, impotently every form of life that came within the range of his distorted vision. He cursed his God.

CHAPTER III

THE DRIVING FORCE

THROUGH the tattered pinewood branches the northern sun's cold rays sought to light the gloomy aisles below. It was like the furtive peeping of curious eyes into mysteries forbidden. On the ragged outskirts its staring light had power; but within the dim recesses it was swallowed up, devoured by the impenetrable gloom of ages, where the woodland depths refused to yield their secrets.

Yet these woods were the haven of many a weary traveler. Since ever the foot of man had trod the watershed, none had failed to seek shelter amid these stately shadows; and at all times they lent a sure retreat before winter's storms to the lesser animal life. No storm could search the deepening valleys; no blizzard could more than stir the mighty canopy; no roar of wind could break the grave-like silence, just as no sunlight had ever yet solved the riddle of its impenetrable heart.

Two men and a woman sat huddled over a crackling fire, at a spot where dozens of fires had burned before. It was cold, bitterly cold, even here where the fierce winds had scarcely power to stir the air. But, even so, the cold could not add one iota to the icy misery of, at least, two of those who watched the miserable effort of the fire to achieve where ages of sunlight had failed.

Beyond the rays of the firelight the meager paraphernalia of a camp loomed up in the twilight. A low tent of rough-tanned hides had been carefully pitched. It was a stout enough shelter of crude Indian workmanship, and it doubtless served its purpose well in a land of storm such as these northern heights of the world. Near by was an up-turned

sled in the course of repair, and again the stout crudeness of workmanship bespoke the Indian hand. The long, rawhide traces were strung out upon the bed of pine-cones and needles which covered the ground, just where the harness had been flung from the shoulders of the weary dogs, who squatted about between their human masters, staring and blinking at the pleasant warmth of the fire with luxurious confidence.

The men were silent, and the woman watched one of them with anxious, troubled eyes. She was longing to speak, to say something that might salve the wounded heart of her lover. But there was nothing, nothing, she knew, that would ease his pain, and restore to his burning, despairing eyes their wonted look of masterful confidence. She knew that, for the time, at least, hope had been hurled from its high pedestal in his heart, and it was beyond her puny woman's strength to restore it to its setting. She yearned to comfort as only a loving woman can, but she was far too well versed in the curiosities of Leo's dominant, almost violent nature, not to realize the futility of such an effort.

So she watched him with hopeless gaze. She saw the fixed stare of his bloodshot eyes boring unseeingly into the pitiful embers of fire. She saw the thick veins standing out upon his temples, and understood the passionate regret and resentment driving him; and as she watched these things, estimating them in her own timid way, she wondered and marveled at the power of gold upon the human heart, and at the terrible effect its loss could have on a strong man's mind.

While she watched the brooding figure her mind went back to the moment of disaster when the sled had fallen. For just as long as she lived those moments would remain vividly in her memory. When Leo had discovered that half the load had torn itself from its fastenings, and had been swallowed up by yawning depths below he went suddenly demented. She knew it. Never in her life had she witnessed so dreadful a change in anybody. Even now the impotent, almost idiotic ravings and cursings of the man rang in her ears. It was terrible. She shuddered at the recollection. Then what followed was no less horrible to one who had always known her lover for a sober-minded, purposeful man. In the midst of the storm, with the wind raging about them,

and the gray fog blinding their eyes, he had stood by threatening her, and refusing to raise a hand in the task of saving the wreck with its remaining half of the cargo.

The toil of those hours. The weary hopeless toil. And it had been accomplished by the Indian and herself under the shadow of this man's insane threats against them both. Once during their struggle, just when the sled was almost within reach of safety she had been driven in self-defence, and in defence of the faithful Si-wash, to hold the maniac at bay under cover of a revolver, whilst the task was completed.

Her life had been strangely checkered, she had passed through many adventures that rarely befall a woman belonging to the life of civilized communities, but the worst moments she had ever known were incomparable with that struggle on the brink of, for all she knew, an unfathomable chasm.

The shadow of that struggle was still upon her. She could not shake it off. She was dreading every passing moment, longing to hear the calm tones of her lover she was used to, but fearing lest the insanity inspired by the loss of his gold had not yet passed.

So she waited, watching, watching for the sign that was to tell her of the easing of the straining brain, watching the dreadful stare of his eyes, as they gazed upon nothing of what they beheld, with a brain lost in a terrible contemplation of the hideous thoughts passing behind them.

Si-wash was silent, too. But that was his way, the way of his race. His impassive face yielded no indication of what was passing behind it. If he feared his companion's mood he gave no sign. Possibly he did not. Possibly he realized that here, here on the wild, chaotic trail he was master; certainly that his chances were equal with the other.

The fire burned low. Si-wash kicked the embers together with his moccasined foot. Then he rose and shuffled to the wood pile and replenished it. For a moment he watched the flicker of the flames as they licked round the dead, inflammable bark, and in desperation Audie broke the awful silence.

"When'll the sled be ready for the road again?" she demanded, without serious interest.

Si-wash's eyes drifted to the cumbersome vehicle.

"I finish him two days," he said, holding up two fingers to impress his assurance upon her.

"Most of the food was saved," Audie went on. "It was the other things that were lost."

The Indian nodded.

"Sure. We freeze but for fire. Him cook-pots go. Only one him saved. Blanket him go. So him go the——"

"Go and get wood, you red son-of-a-moose," cried Leo with sudden vehemence. "Don't stand there yapping like a yellow cur."

The man's bloodshot eyes blazed up furiously into the Indian's face. For a moment Audie feared another outbreak such as she had witnessed before. She even feared for Si-wash's wretched life. But the Indian understood his companion's mood and moved silently off to obey. He admitted to himself that the man was mad; and he had a curious dread of people who were possessed of such a devil.

Leo watched him disappear in the gloom of the woods. Then he turned back impatiently to the fire. He hunched himself up, resting his chin upon his hands, and his elbows on his knees. The mention of their losses had again driven him hard, but, curiously enough, now the eyes of the watching woman saw that his mood had changed for the better. His were less straining, and the veins of his temples no longer stood out like twisted cords. She began to hope. She felt, dangerous as it might seem, that it would be far better that he should talk, whatever pain such talk might cost her. Far better than that he should sit silently nursing his despair.

The idea became fixed in her mind, and she cast about for an opening. Her instinct belonged to her sex; she knew, none better, the burden of dreary thoughts hugged to a silent bosom. It was difficult. Leo was at all times aloof. His armor of reserve left her still a stranger to his inmost feelings and thoughts, so that she scarcely knew how to approach the task she contemplated.

She was spared her trouble, however. It was Leo who at last broke the silence and made possible that very purpose the contemplation of which filled her with so much doubt. He stirred, and swiftly aimed a vicious kick at a log protruding from the embers of the fire. The response was a shower

of sparks flying upward. Then he turned to her and began talking rapidly.

"I—I sometimes feel as if I could blame you for all—this," he began, in a low, harsh tone. "But I don't. I've still got sense enough for that. And it's lucky—lucky for you."

The woman's face paled under the beaver cap pressed low down upon her head. The threat was the more terrible for the simplicity of the manner in which he uttered it.

"How could I be responsible?" she asked, while her heart chilled within her.

"How?" Leo laughed without mirth. "I tell you I don't blame you—and yet I might. I did not intend to make this journey in winter."

Audie understood. She knew he was making this journey for her sake. Therefore she remained silent. How could she deny the blame, which, she knew in her heart, he set at her door?

"Say, I wonder if you know what this means to us—to me," he went on, in a tone of suppressed passion. "No, you don't—you can't. Guess it's not likely. You just remember we've still enough food for the journey which is to bring us where your child can be born in—in decency. You know we have no money. But that don't mean a thing to you, because you guess there's a man's hand ready to get busy in your service. You've no thought for anything else, because—because I guess you're a woman."

He caught his breath sharply as though laboring under a stab of intense bodily pain.

Then he laughed a short harsh laugh.

"If you could only look into my brain—my heart—my feelings, maybe you'd realize something of the destruction that's been done there by the loss of my gold. Oh, I'm no miser, greedily hungering after the precious stuff. It's not that." He paused and looked steadily at her. "I s'pose you can't realize what it means to have the concentrated hopes of years suddenly dashed to a thousand atoms. No, course you can't. You can't see, you can't feel these things, because you have never got up against those hills of success, which confront every man of purpose who's determined to cut himself a path which is to lead him right up to the—

top of things. I've got busy that way, and the walls have fallen in and well nigh broke me up. That's what's happened. But I'm not down and out—yet. Not quite. No. I want to get right up and hurt some one in return. I want to hit out and—hurt. I want to do things by way of—retaliation. Guess there's nothing to—to retaliate on but those very walls that have so nearly crushed me.

"That's the way I'm feeling now. But I don't guess it's all. Not by a sight. Guess I've been well nigh mad. Maybe I was mad. I don't know. I don't care. Anyway I am mad no longer. How long my sanity will last I can't say. All I know is I daren't look back. If I did—well, I wouldn't gamble a heap on the result. No, I got to look forward. Maybe that'll save me."

Audie nodded. The fear of him was dying out of her.

"I think I understand—all," she said, in a low voice. "Yes, look ahead, it will be best for you. Don't let thought of our—our boy concern you now; forget everything—but that goal you spoke of."

Just for a moment the man's eyes softened. He was not insensible to the utter self-effacement in the woman's desire to help and comfort. But they hardened again almost at once.

"I'm not going to let—anything—interfere," he said almost brutally. "My plans are fixed. Now listen. Tomorrow I get right back to Sixty-mile Creek. Anyway I start out for it. I'll have to go on foot. Maybe I shan't ever reach it. Anyway that don't matter. If I do I'll remain there until I have washed up as much gold as I have lost. It may take a year—two—three. It don't matter how long."

"But——" Audie broke in with wide, horrified eyes.

Leo stopped her with a swift gesture.

"It's no use shouting," he said harshly. "I tell you my mind's made up. You'll go on down to the coast with Si-wash. You'll be able to get the help you need there."

"Yes, yes, I can manage. I can get to my sister in San Sabatano."

"Good. You'll go on then. I can trust Si-wash. He's been paid. You'll have food enough, and you'll travel light. If he fails you, and I survive, if I hunt the world over I'll kill him."

Audie's eyes lit. It was the one expression of feeling Leo had displayed which she could take to herself.

"Then afterwards—God knows when—I'll come and marry you. It's the best we can do. It's all I can promise. We're plumb up against it. Whatever happens, I'm going to marry you. That goes."

Audie breathed a deep sigh of heartfelt gratitude. The ice had been broken. She knew that Leo's mental balance was restored. It mattered nothing to her at that moment that she had to face the world alone with her burden of motherhood. It mattered nothing that the shame she had so dreaded was still to be hers. The future had no longer any terrors for her. How should it? The man she had always known had once more resumed sway in the mind so recently distracted to the verge of madness. Her lover was once more the ruthless, powerful creature she had followed into the wilderness, was ready to follow into the wilderness again if he would only permit her.

"Must I—must I go on to the coast? Is there need?" she said, in a low, pleading voice, after a moment's silence. "If you are going back, cannot I go back, too? There's the sled. Why go on foot? Let me return with you, Leo."

The man shook his head, and his negative was as irrevocable as any spoken words. If he understood the devotion prompting her he gave no sign.

"Your life shan't be risked that way," he said. "The child must be born where you can get help. That's—our duty. It's my duty that you reach the coast in safety as far as the matter is humanly possible. Si-wash'll have to fix that. After that I'm helpless—I haven't a cent in the world or I would give it you. You'll have to go on to the coast, and I—I return alone."

Audie bowed her head submissively. She knew he was right under the existing circumstances. Anyway, right or wrong, she was ready to submit to his will. More than that she was glad to do so. Her big eyes stared thoughtfully into the blaze of the fire. There was no more to be said. She was content to sit there in silence, dreaming her dreams; those dreams which the silent northern world so mysteriously fosters, to cover up its own nakedness and make life possible upon its sterile bosom.

Later on the shuffling of Si-wash's moccasins scrunching upon the pine-cones made itself heard. He came with a great load of firewood upon his broad back. Leo watched him deposit it and replenish the fire. Then Audie set about preparing a meal, and the dogs were fed from the store of frozen fish, which, by a trick of Fate, had been saved in preference to their precious store of gold. After that, as the twilit woods were swallowed up in the darkness of night, Audie vanished into the tent, and was seen no more.

The solitude of the tent was preferable to the silence round the fire. She had permitted her lover to dispose of her life as he chose, but she passionately longed to return with him to the north, whatever the dangers to herself and her unborn child. All she cared for was this hard, unyielding man. So long as she had him she could think of and consider those other things which now seemed so small in her life. Without him they were utterly swallowed up by the desolation of all her thoughts and feelings. She wanted him. She wanted this love of hers. Nothing else in the wide world really mattered. He was going out of her life. She knew it. She knew more. He was going out of her life for ever. It was a haunted, despairing woman that sought the warm furs which the man had given up to her use. And the eyes that finally closed in slumber were stained with tears wrung from the very depths of her warm, foolish heart.

For long hours after the woman's eyes had closed in troubled sleep the two men hugged the warmth of the fire. They had neither blanket nor bed. All that had been saved had been given to the woman. The fire stood between them and the bitter cold of the northern night, and beside it was their couch of rotting pine-cones. But they were hardened to the deadly winter, and, so long as they could keep the frost out of their flesh, nothing much mattered.

They smoked in silence, each man busy with his own thoughts; and it was nearly midnight when Si-wash gave his friend the benefit of his profound cogitations.

He had just replenished the fire, and finally drawn up the broken sled as an added protection against the bitter breath of the night breezes. Then he returned to his place and squatted upon his haunches, hugging his knees with his clasped hands, while he puffed at the reeking black clay pipe

which, in the manner of his race, protruded from the center of his mouth.

"I mak 'em long piece way. No plenty wood. I mak 'em mile—two mile." Si-wash held up two fingers.

Leo looked up quickly at this breaking of the silence.

"Sure," he said. "Wood scarce."

Si-wash nodded.

"Plenty scarce." Then after a long pause: "Other man find him. Burn 'em all up."

Leo eyed his companion. Then he grinned unpleasantly.

"Guess there's only one damn-fool outfit on this trail—hereabouts——"

The Indian went on smoking, and nearly a minute passed before he shot a quick, sidelong glance at his white friend.

"No. Two," he said; and the inevitable two fingers were thrust up again before Leo's eyes.

It was the white man's turn to pause before replying now.

"Two?" he said, half incredulously.

The Indian nodded, and again held up two fingers.

"How d'you know?" Leo's question came sharply.

"Smoke," returned the Indian; and his one hand described a series of circles upwards.

"You mean—a camp fire? Where?"

Leo was more than interested.

"So. Back there. Big piece. One—two—three mile." Si-wash held up three fingers in deliberate succession.

Leo's interest seemed to suddenly die out. He had no further questions to ask; and, a moment later, he leaned forward and knocked the ashes from his pipe. Then he rose and moved over to the sled. Here he sat down and supported his back against an iron strut, and stretched his legs out beside the fire. In a few moments he was asleep.

Si-wash remained where he was. He made no preparations for sleep; but he slept, every now and then waking up to replenish the fire. And so the long hours crept on toward the gray dawn.

Daylight had come. Leo yawned and stretched his cramped limbs. Si-wash was still beside the fire. He had melted a pot of snow, the only pot that had been saved from

the wreck on the hillside. He was making tea, boiling it, as is the fashion of all Indians. The smell of it pervaded the camp and reminded Leo that he was hungry.

In half an hour breakfast was over, and Si-wash proceeded with his work on the sled. Audie waited for the commands of her lover. But none were forthcoming. For a long time Leo sat lost in thought, watching the skillful fingers of the Indian at his work, while the fierce sled dogs fought and played around in their untamed, savage way.

The man's expression was quite inscrutable. He was thinking neither of the Indian nor his work. His mind was on other matters, matters which set him puzzling and speculating.

At last he rose and picked up the rawhide rope, which was lying beside the diminished wood pile. He stood for a moment contemplating it. Then he absently stretched it out on his powerful hands, and finally coiled it up.

"Guess I'll climb around and gather wood. So long, Audie," he said briefly.

The next moment the girl's longing eyes were watching his retreating figure as the gray distance swallowed it up.

For a long time she stood thus. Then she started and looked around. It was the Indian's voice that had startled her.

"Him heap good feller. Him no come back bimeby."

The girl's eyes widened with sudden fear.

"What do you mean?" she demanded, with a clutching at her heart.

The Indian's features relaxed into something approaching a smile.

"Him crazy, sure!"

CHAPTER IV

LEO

Leo gazed about him as he left the woodland shadows behind. All sign of the recent blizzard had passed. The world was white, cold, and bathed in the gleaming sunlight of the northern winter. The air was warmer than it had been for days, an unusual phenomenon after such a storm.

For a moment his unexpressive eyes lifted to the shining sky. There was nothing to suggest anything in the nature of one of those rapid changes of weather so much a feature of winter in this region, and the prospect seemed to satisfy him. From the sky his glance drifted to the jagged horizon, and here it searched closely in every direction. For a long time he stood studying every rise and depression in the glacial ocean of hills and valleys; then, slowly, his interest began to wane.

Now a definite disappointment became apparent in the frown that depressed his strong brows. He moved out from the edge of the woods and skirted them until a fresh vista of bald, snow-clad hills presented themselves to his searching eyes. For a time his scrutiny lacked something of its original interest. Then, quite suddenly, it became fixed on one spot, a deep depression, shadowed, and definitely marked, an almost black patch in the white setting of the surrounding world.

In a moment all his interest had revived, and he concentrated all his efforts to read the meaning of that which he beheld.

"He wasn't lying, after all," he muttered at last. And his words gave a key to his recent moments of waning interest.

He knew that the black patch he was looking at was a bluff of woods lying in the narrow valley between two high hills, a bluff of woods such as those which lay behind him. Whether they were larger, or just a small, isolated cluster of trees did not concern him. He was watching a spiral of thin smoke, a faint shadow against the dark backing, as it floated upwards and drifted away, quite invisible after it broke the sky line. He knew that this was the smoke Si-wash had told him of. He knew, as Si-wash had known, that it was the smoke of a camp fire. He wondered whose, and, wondering, he moved out without any hesitation in its direction, determined to ascertain whose hand had lit the fire; a matter which had seemed all unnecessary to the Indian's mind.

Just for a moment he glanced again at the sun, and took his bearings. Si-wash had said three miles at most. Three miles; it was little enough to concern himself about. He knew that unless he encountered unlooked-for difficulties he

would be able to cover the distance, and make the return journey in less than four hours.

So he set off, adopting a course much as the crow might fly. That was his way in all things. He rarely sought to spare himself by seeking the easier route in anything. His goal always assumed a definite point straight ahead of him, so why make the journey longer for the sake of a little ease? Time enough for such deviations when stress of circumstances demanded.

His way took him down a long, easy slope, where, at moments, banks of snow mounted up to many feet in height, and at others the earth lay bare, swept clear by the force of the recent storm. Then it was possible for him to travel swiftly, nor was he put to inconvenience from the fact that he was without his snowshoes.

The depression was quickly passed and terminated in the abrupt rise of a low bald hill whose base was surrounded by a low, shabby scrub. At first glance the hill had a curious resemblance to a monk's shaven crown, but a closer inspection revealed that here was one of those broken hills suggesting the ruin of a one-time magnificient mountain, which must have succumbed under the fierce blastings of one of Nature's passionate moments. The bald crown was a broken sea of torn and riven rocks, which might well have been the result of gigantic operations with dynamite.

The obstruction gave him no pause. Again deviation never entered his head. With infinite purpose he attacked the ascent which amounted to a laborious and even perilous struggle. There was no faltering, and soon he was so far involved that any thought of yielding to the difficulties he encountered became quite out of the question. To return would have been far more difficult than to continue the advance.

The ascent occupied an hour of great physical effort, but at last he stood at the summit breathing hard from his exertions. Here he paused and surveyed the distance. Again was it characteristic of him that he had no longer interest in his immediate surroundings, or the difficulties he had already surmounted. His whole thought was for that which lay ahead, for those difficulties which still remained to be overcome.

The descent of the hill, though it appeared to be no mean accomplishment, was far shorter, and far less abrupt than the upward climb had been. Nor was he sorry for the respite, while still there was no shrinking in him from whatever hazard Nature might have chosen to offer. He had calculated that such was the case, for the whole trend of the land was upward, bearing on up to the crystal peak between which the crowding woodland ahead lay pinched. His eyes wandered on with his thoughts which carried him out in the direction of the tiny ribbon of smoke, still gently rising from the heart of the woods to vanish in the sparkling air above.

He remained for one brief moment while he made a rough estimate of the distance he had yet to go; then, without wasting a precious moment, he dropped upon the first rugged step of the descent. The work was harder than might have been expected, far harder. And the rope he had brought with him frequently stood him in good stead while making those big drops, which, from the distance, seemed so insignificant and easy. But it was never his way to consider difficulties seriously until he found himself in their midst. At all times the needs of the moment were sufficient, and he was firm in the belief that there was no difficulty in human life where an advantageous way out did not lay waiting for the seeker. His mood was the dogged persistence which urges a man on without consideration or thought for anything else in the world but his own all-mastering purpose.

It was this mood which had first driven him to the northern wilderness, where he hoped to acquire the necessary foundations for his fortune in the least possible time. It was this intensity of purpose which had blinded him to the possibilities of burdening himself with the care of a woman. It was this crude driving force which, in face of stupendous difficulties, not to say impossibilities, had decided him to return on foot to Sixty-mile Creek. These things were part of the man. He could not help them.

So it was in the case of his search for this mysterious camp. He was urged to make it, irresistibly urged, and he could have given no definite reasons for his actions.

Slowly there came a change in the man's whole attitude. It was a subtle change, and one wholly unrealized by him-

self. As he gained way over the broken path before him a strange eagerness became apparent in all his movements, in his expression, in the quick, searching glance of his eyes. The deliberate manner in which he had made the ascent now gave way to an impatient eagerness which frequently placed him at considerable risk, and even peril. Often, where the slower process of the rope's assistance would have been safest, he trusted to hands and feet, and even to a jump, with a considerable uncertainty as to where he was going to land. But he took the risks, urged on by this strange, unacknowledged desire to reach his destination quickly.

The broken hill was left behind him after less than an hour's hard struggle; and when, at last, he stood upon the comparatively smooth upland, with the distant fringe of woodlands high up above him, he realized that his estimate, as had been Si-wash's, of the distance, was considerably at fault. He had still full three miles to go amidst the hills and valleys made by snow banks swept up by the storm, before the mystery of that thread of smoke could be fully solved.

But the way was easy, and he hurried on. The brief day was passing rapidly. Strangely enough all thought of time had passed from him. It no longer occurred to him that he had to return to his own camp to make his preparations for his contemplated journey back to the creek. He had become solely absorbed with the quest in hand. That, and that alone, seemed to matter.

Half an hour's tramping brought him within full and intimate view of the edge of the woods; and, as he drew near, a further change crept into his manner. Once he paused, more than half hidden by a snow bank, and gazed up at the towering crests of the aged pines. He was impressed. These woods were of far greater extent than those which had served him as a shelter from the storm. They towered dizzily, and spread out an immense distance along the sides of the two mountains, between which they had seemed so pinched; and somehow their immensity depressed him with a feeling of the smallness of human life.

It was from this moment that the fresh change in him took place. He left the shelter of the snow bank with a curious crouching gait, and eyes furtively watchful. The

reason of the change was quite unapparent, even to himself. He knew that he was searching for a sight of fellow-creatures; but what he did not know was that it was inspired by an active instinct to avoid contact.

He crept on from the shelter of one snow bank to the shelter of another. He moved along over the shallows of snow so that his moccasined feet gave out no sound. And his whole progress bespoke an almost frantic desire that his approach should not be witnessed from the woods.

Nearer and nearer he drew, and, as the shadows came down toward him, his pace increased almost to a run. Finally the last sheltering snow bank was left behind and a low broken scrub replaced it. He breathed a deep sigh; the sigh of a man who is relieved beyond words. The gray, familiar gloom of the forest overshadowed him, and he was content. Just for a few moments he paused for breath. Then his restless spirit urged him on, and, plunging forward, the solemn twilight of the forest swallowed him up.

For quite a while he hurried on like a flitting shadow in the midst of a world of shadows. Then, finally, he paused listening. The grave-like silence was quite unbroken by any sign of life. Nothing came to him stirring the echoes of that ages-old world. He strained hard for some familiar sound that might guide him to the spot where the mysterious camp lay. But no such sound was forthcoming.

CHAPTER V

THE SHADOW OF DEATH

A DEEP stillness prevailed while the man stood in profound contemplation of the figure beneath the covering of furs. The silent woods suggested the calm of a shadowed sepulcher. The shrouded figure lying at his feet completed the suggestion.

Tug's eyes, if unsympathetic, were at least anxious. The sunken features of his companion filled him with a curious feeling of superstitious awe at the stealing, subtle approach of death. Death, in the abstract, had no terrors for him. The sight of a life suddenly jolted out of earthly existence would have disturbed him not at all; but this steady march,

this almost imperceptible progress, stirred those feelings of superstition which underlie all human life.

He noted the hungry shadows of an unearthly blue which surrounded the sunken eyes, and filled the hollow sockets. The greenish tinge in the pallid flesh revolted him; the lips, so drawn, with all their ruddy ripeness gone, left him with a feeling of positive nausea; while the utter helplessness in the way the trunk collapsed beyond the rough pillow supporting the lolling head, left him shrinking at the thought of the speeding life whose ebb he was powerless to check.

Well enough he knew that death was hovering well within sight. Poor Charlie, the companion of his fortunes, was rapidly passing away. There was no help he could bestow, no real help. All he could do was to minister to each whim expressed in the thin, struggling voice; for the rest the march of Death must go on. For many days the end had been steadily approaching, and now the icy breath in the shadow of Death's hovering wings seemed to add a chill to the wintry air, and freeze up the heart in his own robust body.

Tug's expression was one of hopeless incompetence. He wondered, as he had wondered for days, what he could do to help the sufferer. He knew that pneumonia had laid its clutch upon the poor wretch's lungs, and all treatment for it was a riddle to which he found no answer.

His eyes lifted from the dying man, and he stared about him vaguely. They took in the squatting dogs, reveling in the comfort of the flickering firelight, well sheltered from the breath of winter by the canvas screen he had erected to shelter his sick companion. The sight of these luxuriating beasts annoyed him; and, with a vicious kick at the nearest, he sent them scuttling into the background.

Then he glanced at his diminished store of wood. Here lay the only service his helplessness permitted his thought to rise to. Yes, he could still strive to keep the cold, that stealing cold which Charlie had cried out against so bitterly, that cold which he had declared had eaten into his very bones, from his dying friend. So he moved over to the pile and replenished the fire with liberal hand, till the last stick in his store had found its way to the hungry flames. Then, with a curious patience, almost gentleness, he once more

tried to administer the fragrant, but less savory soup, which was always kept simmering in the boiler on the fire.

It was curious to watch this powerful specimen of virile, unsympathetic manhood endeavoring to assume the indescribable gentleness of the nurse. It fitted him as ill as anything well could, yet he did his best. And no one knew better than he that his patient was beyond such clumsy, well-meaning efforts. The lips remained closed, as did the sunken eyes, and no words of rough encouragement seemed to penetrate to the dull brain behind them.

At last Tug put the pannikin aside, and dropped the tin spoon with a clatter. He could do no more. Again he rose to his feet and stood helplessly by.

"Poor devil," he muttered. "His number's plumb up."

At the sound of his voice there came a slight movement of the lolling head. Then the great eyes opened slowly, and stared up at the muttering man in an uncanny, unseeing fashion.

"Sure."

The one word, spoken in the faintest of whispers, told Tug that the dying man's intellect remained unimpaired, and the knowledge left him annoyed with himself that he had spoken aloud.

"I'm kind of sorry, Charlie," he blundered. "I didn't just guess you could hear."

"I've—known it—days." The other struggled painfully with his words.

Tug had no answer for him, and Charlie went on in his halting fashion.

"It—don't—matter. I was thinking of my—folks."

"Sure. I know." Tug sighed in a relief he could not have explained.

He waited.

For some time the sick man made no answer. It almost seemed as if his straining intellect had been overtaxed, for the glazing eyes remained immovable, and, to the waiting man, he might have been already dead.

He bent over him, his anxiety driving him to reassure himself. It was his movement that again broke the deathly spell. Slowly a gleam of intelligence struggled into the staring eyes, and the man's lips moved.

"It's my share—my—share—of the gold." He gave a short quick gasp. "I want them—to—have—it. It—was—for them."

Tug nodded.

"I know. You always said you wanted it for your folks. I'll—see they get it. Is—there anything else?"

"No. Say——"

Tug waited. As the silence remained he urged the dying man.

"Yes?"

"It's no good. They—they—won't—get—it."

"What d'you mean—they won't get it?" Tug's face flushed. He felt that his promise was doubted. A promise given in all good faith, and under the spell of that dreadful thrill, which never fails to make itself felt in a promise to the dying. "I've given my word. Isn't that sufficient?"

"Sure. But——" The man broke off gasping.

After a while the struggle eased and his whispering voice became querulous.

"It's—it's—cold. The—the fire's going—out."

Tug glanced quickly at the fire. It was burning brightly. Then he remembered he had used up the last of the fuel.

From the fire he turned to the dying man again. He understood. It was the march of Death, that cold he complained of. His hard face struggled painfully for an expression of sympathy.

"Yes," he said. "I'll go and collect more wood. I—I didn't notice the fire going down. We must keep the cold out of you."

The lolling head made a negative movement.

"You—can't. It's—it's—all—over me. I'll——" Another shuddering sigh, half shiver, half gasping for breath, passed through the man's body. Then the thin eyelids closed, and no effort on Tug's part could produce any further sign of life.

For a long time he endeavored, striving by words of encouragement to persuade the weary eyes to open. But they remained obstinately shut. The man's breathing was of the faintest, too; a sign which Tug felt was full of omen. He hated his own helplessness; and he cursed under his breath the madness of his attempt to save his companion by making

this wild journey. Back there on Sixty-mile Creek he felt that though the man had been doomed, this sudden collapse into pneumonia might have been averted. He had been foolish, criminally foolish to make this mad attempt; and yet——

He moved away. No, he could do nothing else, so he might just as well go and gather wood. He had half the day in front of him. It would be better to do something useful than to remain there watching and talking to a man practically dead. Anyway it would be more wholesome. He knew that the dread of Charlie's death was growing on him. For some unaccountable reason it was attacking his nerves. The woods seemed to be haunted with strange shadows he had never felt the presence of before. He must certainly get to work.

From the far side of the fire he glanced back at the ominous pile of blankets and furs. He saw the man's head move. It lolled over to the other side. It was the only sign of life he gave. The eyes remained closed, and the ashen lips were tightly shut.

The movement, the vision of that deathly figure suddenly set the strong man's skin creeping. He hurried away, almost precipitately.

CHAPTER VI

ALL-MASTERING PASSION

Not a movement disturbed the tomb-like peace of the aged woods; no sound broke the profound silence. It was as if even Nature herself were held in supreme awe of the presence of Death.

In the absence of all restraint Tug's dogs crept toward the fire, and crouched within the radius of its pleasant warmth, their great muzzles resting between outstretched paws, their fierce eyes staring steadily at the ruddy flicker of the leaping flames. Maybe they were dreaming of those savage ancestors from whom they sprang; maybe memories of fierce battles, of gluttonous orgies, of desperate labors, were crowding pleasantly under the charm of the moment's

ease. But twitching ears bespoke that curious canine alertness which is never relaxed.

The moments passed rapidly; moments of delight which rarely fall to the lot of the wolfish trail dog. It was an oasis of leisure in lives spent betwixt the labor of the trail and the settling of fierce quarrels, which, to the human mind, possess no apparent cause.

Then again, in the briefest of seconds, the whole scene was changed. It came as one of the dogs lifted its head gazing intently at the pile of furs under which the sick man lay.

It was a tense moment. Every muscle in the creature's powerful body was set quivering, and a strange, half pathetic, half savage whimper escaped its twitching nostrils. Every head about the fire was abruptly lifted, every ear was set pricked alertly, and each pair of fierce eyes stared hard in a similar direction.

There was no sign of movement among the furs, no change of any sort, nothing whatsoever to arouse such tense ferocity, even alarm. But those things were there in every eye, in the pose of each savage creature, in the slow rising of harsh manes until they bristled high upon every shoulder.

One dog rose to its feet.

Each dog rose slowly in turn; slowly and watchfully. And now a further change became apparent in their attitudes. All ferocity suddenly died out, leaving only alarm, a desperate, currish terror. Manes still bristled like the teeth of fine combs, but ears were flattened to lowered heads, and great whipping tails curled under, between crouching hind legs, while lifted lips left gleaming fangs displayed in currish snarls.

Yet the sick man's bed at which they stared still remained undisturbed. The man beneath the blankets had not stirred. He was still, so still. It was as if these brutish eyes beheld something invisible to the human eye; something which crushed their hearts under an overwhelming burden of fear.

For nearly a minute the statue-like tenseness of attitude remained. Then the spell was broken. One dog, the largest of all, the leader of the team, the oldest in the craft of the trail, oldest in years, and, possibly, far the oldest in canine wisdom, squatted upon its haunches and licked its lips. One by one the rest followed its example, and, finally, with sighs

as of relief, they returned again to their luxurious basking in the firelight.

But the leader did not attempt to return to the charmed circle of the fire. It seemed as if he realized a sense of responsibility. Presently he rose, and, with gingerly tip-toeing, moved away from his companions. He edged warily toward the sick man's bed. He drew near, snuffing at the air, ready to draw back instantly should his wisdom so prompt him. Nearer and nearer he drew, and with lowered muzzle he snuffed at the edge of the bed. With stealthy, creeping gait he made his way toward the pillow, snuffing as he went. Then, as his greenish eyes rested upon the man's lolling head, he again squatted upon his haunches and licked his lips. The next moment a low whimper broke the silence. It grew louder. Finally the dog's great head was lifted, its muzzle was thrown high into the air, and the whimper was changed into a long-drawn-out howl of amazing piteousness. It was doling the death warning of its race.

A chorus of whimpered acknowledgment came from the fire. The other dogs stirred restlessly, but that was all. The fire was too pleasant, such moments as were just now theirs were all too few in their laborious lives for them to emulate the mourning of their leader. So they resettled themselves and went on with their dreaming.

Then the mourner gave up his office. This tacit refusal to join him had rendered his position untenable. So, not without resentment in his heart, he, too, returned to the fire, and, with a sense of duty duly performed, once more buried his nose between his paws, and gave himself up to profound meditation.

But it was not for long. Within five minutes every dog was on his feet again thrilling with a wild feeling of passionate resentment. There was no mistaking their mood at this fresh disturbance. There was no craven slinking, there were no currish snarls. Each dog was on his toes ready to battle with a tangible foe, such as they now anticipated.

For some moments the reason of the disturbance was not apparent. Their supersensitive hearing reached beyond the range of that of their human masters. But at last the sound of muffled footsteps awoke dimly the echoes of the woods. A man was approaching. He was walking swiftly,

moving along with the soft crunch of hurrying, moccasined feet.

His shadowy figure loomed up out of the gray twilight of the woods; and, just beyond the camp, he halted and hurled a string of deep-voiced curses at the growling dogs. Instantly the chorus of canine displeasure ceased, and the creatures backed away from the forbidden pleasures of the fire. These animals acknowledged no definite master, but they obeyed man. For such was their teaching upon the trail.

Now the man came on fearlessly, searching the camp with quick, furtive eyes that had no scruples. It seemed deserted, except for the dogs, the memory of whose presence about the fire further convinced him that it must be so. Without hesitation he began a closer examination; and the first thing to interest him was the sled, with its rough harness spread out just where the dogs had been freed from their traces. Instant recognition leaped into his eyes.

"Tug's!" he murmured. Then, after a pause, he added, "I wonder."

His interest rose swiftly, and his quick-moving eyes passed on to the bed, with its pile of furs. Just for a moment he hesitated. It was almost as if some premonition of what lay beneath them gave him pause. Then, with a movement almost of defiance, he stepped toward it and dropped on one knee beside the pillow. Again there came a pause, but his turned ear explained it. He was listening. Listening for the sound of breathing. But no sound came to him; and, at last, with no great gentleness, he turned back the cover.

An ashen face with staring sightless eyes looked up into his; and for long moments he remained bent over it, lost in a profound study of what he beheld. Then slowly he raised one powerful hand, and, with something like shrinking, pressed an outstretched finger against the dropped jaw. It yielded to his touch, and the mouth shut, but the moment the pressure was relaxed it slowly reopened, and resumed its deathly gape.

"Dead!" he muttered; and the meaning of the camp puzzled him no longer.

He raised his head and glanced from the empty sled,

empty of all but the store of dog food, to the tent, and a wild passionate light shone in his eyes. His whole expression had changed, merged into one of desperate desire. The dead man was instantly forgotten. All speculations were forgotten for the moment, absorbed in the thought of the possibility of the return of the living Tug. His busy brain was full of excitement which set his pulses hammering, and the blood rushing through his veins. But he had not stirred from his place beside the dead.

He turned his head much in the manner of a man hunted, and dreading his own shadow. His eyes peered out into the gray twilight of the forest. He was listening, too. Listening for that sound which was to tell him of the return of the owner of the camp. But no sound reached him. He saw that the dogs had crawled back to the fire, and their attitude further told him that they were still unaware of any approach.

His eyes came back to the tent and a torrent of thought poured its flood through channels which seemed bursting under the sudden pressure; and through it all passed a vague wonder as to what God or devil had inspired him to seek out the mystery of this camp.

But he sought no answer. He desired no answer. He knew that an irresistible passion was driving him, a passion he had no desire to thwart, a passion he hugged to himself and whose influence warmed him to an almost insane joy. And under its strange driving he became active. A hundred thoughts swept through his brain, each finding expression in his swiftly moving eyes.

Again he surveyed the camp. The dogs still hugged the now low-burning fire. From the fire he turned to the spot where the fuel store had evidently been kept. There was no more wood, and the axe was gone, and thus he accounted for Tug's absence. Furthermore he understood that he might return at any moment. Therefore if he were to act at all it must be at once.

He rose to his feet and moved swiftly across to the tent, and as he went the memory of all he had lost upon the trail swept over him. He told himself he had been robbed, robbed just as surely as if human hands had wrested from him the prize he had toiled so desperately to win. This came in

answer to the voice of conscience; but conscience had no power against the driving force which was the whole substance of his life. Some strange fate had driven him toward an opportunity that he was not the man to miss. Charlie, that mild, harmless partner of Tug was dead; and Tug—well, Tug was probably living, but he had never been a friend of his. He had always felt subtly antagonistic toward him. What mattered if—if he robbed him? Yes, that was what he intended. He would rob him, and——

He raised the flap of the tent and passed within, letting the curtain fall behind him.

Not a sound broke the stillness outside. The dogs stirred without sound. Their ease was passing. It was almost as if they knew that the law of club and trace was soon to claim them again.

In a few moments Leo reappeared. A fresh change had come over him. His work was in full progress, and now the light in his eyes was less straining, less passionate. Now he was once more the man of purpose, keen, swift-thinking, ready. The passionate obsession that was his was once more under control, its desire having been satisfied in the acquisition of the bag of gold he now hugged in his arms. The keenest essence of his thought was at work. Possibility after possibility opened out in a series of pictures before his mind's eye, and, with swift slashes, like the progress of the surgeon's knife, his brain cut them about, extracting every detail of importance, assimilating the living, the vital points.

Though powerless to resist the temptation held out to him, he knew full well its meaning. He knew what possible consequences hovered on the horizon of his future. The morality of his act concerned him not at all, but those other considerations demanded his closest attention. All his plans must be reorganized. Now there was no need to return for laborious years on Sixty-mile Creek, and a great joy flooded his heart at the thought. He could take up his plans where they had been broken by the disaster in the storm. But there must be a difference. There must be considerable modification. He thought of Audie, and at once the necessary modifications unrolled before the keen pressure of thought he was laboring under.

Audie and the Indian could still go on, he thought, as his eyes surveyed the five great husky dogs with satisfaction All that had been arranged for her could remain—for the present. She was still to remain a part of his life. He had given his promise, and he was more than satisfied to fulfill it when the time in his affairs came for such fulfillment. Then there was Tug. Tug must be provided for; and as the thought came to him a grim, half smile twisted the corners of his compressed lips. Yes, he would leave him written instructions, which, if he knew the man, would not be ignored.

These thoughts passed swiftly through his mind in the midst of action. He saw the whole situation as plainly and simply as though Providence itself had ordained the whole scheme. There was only one thing that could upset it—Tug's premature return. But he set the thought aside. He would not contemplate it. That must take care of itself. He would deal with it when it occurred.

Reluctantly enough he bestowed Tug's store of gold upon the sled, lashing it doubly secure after his disastrous experiences. Then he stored bedding and food upon the vehicle. He provided a sufficient but light enough load, for he knew he must travel fast and reach the coast long before those others. Si-wash was behind him, and Si-wash knew every inch of the trail, whereas he only had a vague knowledge which might fail him at any moment.

Within half an hour the pack on the sled was complete, and the great dogs stood in their harness ready to do the behests of their new master as willingly as those of the old. But the last item of his program still remained to be attended to. Leo searched his pockets and found the stub of a pencil, but no paper rewarded his efforts. For a moment he was at a loss. Then he bethought him of the tent, and passed beneath the flap. In a few moments he returned with a sheet of waterproof paper, such as is used to line biscuit boxes, and he sat down on his pack and began to write. And all the time he was writing the grim twist of his lips remained. He seemed to find some sort of warped humor in what he was doing.

His writing finished he secured the paper on the front of the tent where it must easily be seen. Then he stood off to read it.

"My Dear Tug:

"I find it necessary to commandeer your gold. Mine is at the bottom of a precipice ten miles back, if you care to make the exchange. Si-wash will tell you where. I suggest you either wait here till they come along, or go back to my camp in the woods, beyond the broken hill, and join Si-wash there. Anyway you can travel down with him. They have dogs and camp outfit, and I have left here sufficient food, etc., for your needs. I have found you a better friend than I ever hoped to. So long. Good luck.

"Leo."

Leo read his note over with evident satisfaction. He had no scruples whatever. He saw in one direction only. Straight ahead of him, his eyes turning neither to the right nor to the left of the path of life he had marked out for himself. He believed that the battle must always go to the strong; sentimentality, pity, were feelings he did not acknowledge. He knew of their existence, and deplored them as the undermining germ responsible for the disease of decadence which has wrought the destruction of more than half the great empires in the world's history. And what the world's history had not taught him he had gleaned from the lives of great men, as he saw greatness. Greatness to him meant conquest, and the world's conquerors had been men utterly devoid of all the tenderer feelings of humanity. They had embarked upon their careers thrilling with the lust of the ancient savage, or the ruthless courage of the animal kingdom, qualities which he regarded as the essence of life, as Nature had intended it. So he gave himself up to a similar course. He would rather be a king by savage conquest, than the hereditary monarch of a race whose vitality is slowly being sapped by the vampire of sentimentality.

He picked up Tug's gee-pole, and gave one swift final glance over the camp. Then, stooping, he covered the staring face of the dead man with a blanket and turned to the dogs.

A sharp command and the traces were drawn taut. Another, and the journey had begun. The dogs, fresh from their week of idleness, strained at their breast harness, and the sled moved slowly, heavily over the dry bed of the forest.

But it soon gained impetus, and the twilit shadows of the primordial forest quickly swallowed it up.

As the scrunch of the pine-cones under the steel runners died away the calm of ages once more settled upon the woods. The dying fire burned lower and lower, and the deathly stillness was unbroken even by a crackle of sputtering flame. The solitude was profound and full of melancholy.

The minutes crept on. They lengthened into an hour. Then far in the distance, it seemed, came the soft pad as of some prowling forest beast. But the pad quickly changed to the soft scrunch of moccasined feet, and, presently, a man, bearing a great load of wood upon his broad back, came on through the dusky aisles of the forest.

CHAPTER VII

DEAD FIRES

Tug did most things with a smile; but it was never the happy smile of a pleasant nature. Nor was it even a mask. It was an expression of his attitude toward the world, toward all mankind. His eyes conveyed insolent contempt; and his smile was one of the irritating irony and cynicism which permeated all his thoughts and feelings.

But his smile was for those looking on. There were times when another man looked out of the same eyes; a man whose cold heart loomed up ugly and threatening out of those deeper recesses of feeling which the shrewd might guess at, but were rarely admitted to.

Tug was a man whose selfish desire was above and before all things. He was of that temper which saw injustice and wrong in every condition of life obtaining, in every established institution of man, even in the very edicts of Nature. It was impossible for him to see anything but through the jaundiced light of his own utter selfishness. Every condition over which he had no control contained a threat, which, in his view of things, was directed against the fulfillment of his desires. He wanted the world and all its possibilities for comfort, pleasure, profit, for his own, without the effort of making it so; and had he obtained it he would undoubtedly

have grumbled that there was no fence set up as a bar to all trespassers upon his property.

He detested the thought that others held possessions which he had not. But it was not his way to air his grievance from a personal point of view. He adopted a subtler course, and a common enough course among men of his class. He cloaked his own selfishness under a passionate plea for those others similarly debarred, railing at the injustice of the distribution of the world's benefits, and storming against class distinctions and all the lesser injustices which went to make up the dividing line between capacity and incapacity. In short he was, though as yet unprofessed, a perfect example of the modern socialist whose utter selfishness prompts methods and teachings which are the profoundest outrage against the doctrines of the Divine Master, who demanded that man should love his neighbor as himself.

Tug had not the moral courage for an open fight, and here he was far inferior to the greater adventurer, Leo. Leo would drive roughshod over everybody and everything; the whole wide world if necessary. He would gain his end by the frank courage of the fighter, which must always command a certain admiration, even if condemnation goes with it. But Tug had no such qualities. It was for him to wriggle and twist, using anybody and anything, by subtle underhand workings, to achieve a similar purpose. But again, even in his purpose he was Leo's inferior. Leo's desire was for victory, victory in the great struggle of modern life, and not for the fleshpots which that victory would entitle him to. Tug desired victory, too, but it was that he might taste the sweetest morsels which those fleshpots contained. Whichever way the struggle went there could be little doubt as to who would claim the applause from the balconies at the fall of the curtain.

When Tug reached his camping ground he found himself in a land of dead fires. The cold, gray ashes were everywhere about him. Life had gone; hope had fled. And the charred embers of the camp-fire in the center of it were the symbol of the ruin.

His quick eyes took in the picture, while his cold heart read something of the meaning of what he beheld. The

absence of his dogs first drew his attention, and this was swifty followed by the realization that his sled was nowhere to be seen. Then his eyes caught the notice which was written on biscuit paper and secured to the front of his tent. He threw down his burden of dead wood, which had still remained upon his back, and stood in front of the message Leo had left him.

For long minutes he stood while the words, the bitter, ironical sentences, sank deep into his selfish heart. Here he was treated to the very attitude he loved to assume himself, and it lashed him to a cold, deadly fury. Again and again he read the message and each time he read it he found fresh fuel with which to build the icy fire of his rage. The theft itself was maddening, but strangely enough the tone of impudent triumph in which Leo addressed him drove him hardest. All that was worst in him was stirred, and the worst of this man was something so malignant and unsavory that the absent Leo might well have shrunk before its pursuing shadow.

No word passed his lips; no expression changed his features, except for the sudden cold pallor which had spread itself over them. Words rarely expressed his deeper feelings; he was not the man to storm in his despair. His whole mind and body were concentrated in a deadly desire to find a means of coming up with the man who had injured him. With each passing moment the words of the message gravened themselves deeper and deeper upon his mind, until they filled his whole thought, and left him panting for revenge. As long as he lived that message would float before his mind's eye, that message which told him of the dead fires about him, that message staring out at him upon the wreck of all his hopes. Yes, as long as he lived that moment would stay with him. As long as he lived he would wait for the ruin, even the life of the man who had wronged him.

Suddenly he made a movement with his moccasined heel. It was his only expression. The pine-cones crushed under it; and to him it was the life of the man, Leo, he was crushing out.

With a steady hand he reached out and removed the paper from its fastenings. He folded it deliberately, carefully, and bestowed it in an inner pocket. Somehow its possession had

suddenly become precious to him, and a certain contentment was his as he turned away and seated himself on an upturned box.

It might have seemed curious that he made no attempt to search his camp. It would have been natural enough. But that was the man. In his mind there was no need for search. The message, he knew, told the truth, and the blow had fallen upon a nature that would not uselessly rack its feelings by vain hopes such as a search might inspire. Besides, he knew this man Leo. He knew him, and hated him; and in his hatred he believed that the thought of his vain searching would give his despoiler malicious pleasure.

For long he sat there before the dead fire. His comrade remained unheeded. He was thinking, thinking desperately in his cold fashion. And curiously enough the possession of that paper helped to inspire him. Already he contemplated it as a sort of token that, in the end, he would return an hundredfold the injury done him. Yes, it should be his mascot through life, it should be a guiding star to his whole career. It should be his inspiration when the moment came. No thought of any law entered his mind. He knew that the crimes of this bitter northern world were beyond the reach of the laws of civilized man. No, the only law that could serve him was the law that each made for himself. He would make his own law—when the time came. There would be no mercy. Mercy? He smiled. And it was a smile so cruel and cold that it might well have damped the courage of the great Leo himself.

Night closed down before Tug stirred from his seat; and when the movement came it was inspired by the bitter cold which had eaten into his stiffening joints, and the gnawings of hunger to which he had been so long oblivious.

He rose abruptly. The present was with him again, the dread present of the bitter northern trail; and he set to work with all the deliberation of a man who understands the needs of the moment, and has no thought beyond them. He rekindled the fire, and boiled the water for his tea. He prepared the dried fish and cooked it. Then he sat down and devoured his meal with all the relish of a hungry man without a care in the world.

But he did not seek his blankets afterwards. The fire had

warmed his bones, and the food had satisfied his craving stomach. So he remained where he was, smoking and thinking; dreaming the ugly dreams of a mind devoid of any of the tenderer thoughts of humanity.

Hours passed, and the long sleepless night dragged on toward a gray, hopeless dawn; and, by the time the black woods began to change their hue, and the gray to creep almost imperceptibly down the aged aisles, his last plans were complete.

Then he arose and stretched himself. He put his pipe away, and replenished the fire with the last of the wood, finally setting water thereon to boil. Then, picking up his axe, he moved off into the deeps of the wood.

In half an hour he returned with a burden of rough-hewn stakes which he flung down beside the fire, while he prepared his breakfast. He devoured his meal hurriedly, and within another half hour was at work upon his final tasks.

He stored all his property inside the tent, removing the furs and blankets from his dead comrade. It almost seemed like desecration. Yet Tug knew what he was at. It would not do to leave the body encased in warm furs. The man would have to be buried—later. In the meantime the cold would freeze the body, and preserve it until such time.

Now the purpose of his stakes became evident. Even Tug, selfish and callous as he was, acknowledged his duties to the dead. He knew the prowling scavengers of the forests too well to leave his comrade without sufficient protection. So he proceeded to secure the body under a cage of timber which would defy the attacks of marauding carnivora.

With Charlie left secure his work was complete. Broad daylight was shining among the rugged crowns of towering pines. The moment had come for his departure. He would obey the letter of Leo's instructions. He would follow the path he had marked out for him. Afterwards he would choose his own path; a path which he knew, somewhere in the future, near or far, would eventually bring him within striking distance of the quarry he intended to hunt down.

CHAPTER VIII

SI-WASH CHUCKLES

It was Si-wash who first witnessed the approach of the newcomer; and he at once realized that it was not the return of his friend, Leo, the man whom he still liked, in spite of the madness which he believed now possessed him.

So he watched thoughtfully from the shadow of the fringe of the forest. He peered out over the white plain upon which an ineffective sun poured its steely rays, while he studied the details of figure and gait, which, in a country where contact with his fellows was limited, were not likely to leave him in doubt for long.

Presently he vanished within the woods. He went to convey his news to the waiting woman, the woman whose heart was full of a dread she could not shake off, whose love was silently calling, calling for the return of the man who was her whole world.

But his news must be told in his own way, a way which, perhaps, only an Indian, and those whose lives are spent among Indians, can understand.

He came to the fire and sat down, squatting upon his haunches, and remained silent for some minutes. Then he picked up a red-hot cinder and lit his black clay pipe, which he produced from somewhere amidst the furs which encased his squat body.

"We go bimeby," he said, after a long pause. "No storm —no snow. Him very fine. Good."

Audie's brooding eyes lifted from the fire to the Indian's broad face. All her fear, all her trouble was shining in their depths. The man saw and understood. But he did not comment.

"We can't go—yet," she said. "We must wait. Leo will come back. Oh, I'm sure he'll come back."

The Indian puffed at his pipe, and finally spat a hissing stream into the fire.

"Maybe," he said.

The woman's face flushed.

"Maybe? Of course he'll come back," she cried with heat. "He—he has gone to collect wood."

The Indian nodded and went on smoking.

"Him fetch wood. Sure," he said presently. "Him go day—night—morning. Si-wash fetch wood. One hour—two—three. Then Si-wash come back. Si-wash not crazy."

Suddenly Audie sprang to her feet. Her eyes flashed, and a fierce anger swept through her whole body.

"Leo is not crazy. Don't dare to say he is," she cried vehemently. "I—I could kill you for saying it."

The Indian gave no sign before the woman's furious threat. He smoked on, and when she had once more dropped to her seat, and the hopeless light in her eyes had once more returned, he removed his pipe from his mouth.

"Si-wash—you kill 'em. It no matter. Leo, him crazy still. You stop here—an' freeze. So. It much no good."

The man's good humor was quite unruffled, and Audie, in spite of her brave defence of her lover, despairingly buried her face in her hands.

"But he will come back, Si-wash!" she cried haltingly. "Say he will. You know him. You understand him. He must come back. Say he must. He can never travel this country on foot, without food or shelter. Oh, say he must come back!"

But Si-wash was not to be cajoled from his conviction. He saw the woman's misery, but it meant nothing to his unsentimental nature. Leo had gone. Well, why should she worry? There were other men in the world. This is what he felt, but he would not have expressed it so. Instead of that he merely shook his head, and spoke between the puffs of his reeking pipe.

"Leo no come. But the other, him come. Tug, him come quick. Maybe him speak of Leo."

In a flash the girl's beautiful eyes shot a gleaming inquiry into the man's coppery face.

"Tug? Tug coming here? It's—it's you who're crazy. Tug is miles away. He must be getting near the coast by now. He must be safe by now, safe with his precious gold."

"Maybe him not safe. Maybe him lose him gold, too."

"You mean——?"

Audie caught her breath as she left her inquiry unfinished.

"Nothing. All same Tug him come here. I see him. Hark? Sho! That him—he mak noise."

The Indian turned slowly round and stared out into the twilit woods. Audie followed the direction of his gaze and sat spellbound, listening to the sound of hurrying feet as they crushed the brittle underlay of the woods. The Indian's dogs, too, had become alert. They were on their toes, with bristling manes and deep-throated grumbling at the intrusion.

As Tug came up Si-wash rose and clubbed the dogs cordially. In a moment they had resumed their places beyond the fire circle, and, squatting on their haunches, licked their lips and yawned indifferently.

"Tug!"

Audie was on her feet staring at the apparition of the man she had believed was even now nearing the coast.

Nor did the man's usual ironical smile fail him.

"Sure. Didn't you guess I'd get around after—what has happened?"

Audie eyed him blankly as he waited for her to speak. The Indian, with his eyes fixed upon the fire, had not stirred from his seat. For the moment he was forgotten by these white people. He moved now. It was a slight movement. Very slight. He merely thrust one of his lean hands inside his furcoat.

His movement was quite unnoticed by the others, and as Audie stared, quite at a loss for words, the man went on—

"Well? He's got away with it. Maybe you're—satisfied."

Tug's smile was unequal to the task. The cold rage under it made its way into his eyes. And as she listened a curious change crept into Audie's eyes, too. Si-wash, with his attention apparently on the fire, was yet quite aware of the change in both, and his hand remained buried in the bosom of his furcoat.

Audie had suddenly become very cool. She pointed at the box which had been Leo's seat.

"You'd better sit down," she said coldly. "You seem to have something to tell me."

"Tell you?" Tug laughed. "Do you need telling?" he asked, as he dropped upon the seat.

Audie resumed her place at the opposite side of the fire.

The Indian smoked on.

"You'd best tell us all you've got to tell," Audie said, with cold severity. "At the present moment you appear to be quite mad or—foolish."

Her manner had the effect of banishing the man's hateful smile. He stared at her incredulously, and, from her icy face, his eyes wandered to the motionless figure of the silent Indian.

"What the hell!" he cried suddenly. "Do you want to tell me that you don't know what Leo's done? Do you want to tell me the whole lousy game isn't a plant, put up by the three of you? Do you want to tell me——?"

"I want to tell you, you're talking like a skunk. If you've got anything to tell us tell it in as few words as possible, or —get out back to your camp."

It was a different woman talking now; a very different woman to the forlorn creature who had appealed to Si-wash a few minutes ago. Just for a second the Indian's eyes flashed a look in her direction, and it was one of cordial approval.

But neither of the others saw it, and if they had it is doubtful if either would have understood. For the mind of Si-wash was one of those deep, silent pools, far more given to reflection than revealing their own secrets.

Tug stared brutally into the woman's face. Audie was displaying a side to her character he had never witnessed before. She was alone with him—the Indian didn't count in his reckoning—she had no hesitation in dictating to him, even, as he chose to regard it, insulting him. His astonishment gave him pause, and he pulled himself together. Then he found himself obeying her in a way he had never thought of doing.

Suddenly he thrust his hand into the bosom of his clothing and withdrew it swiftly. His whole action was the impulsive result of a rush of passionate feeling. Nor did it require his words to tell of the condition of mind he was laboring under.

"Read that," he cried furiously, "if you are as ignorant of his doings as you make out. Read it, and—and be damned."

He flung out his arm across the fire, his hand grasping the biscuit paper on which the fateful message was written.

Quite undisturbed by his brutality Audie took the paper and unfolded it.

"It was left fastened on the front of my tent while I was away fetching wood," Tug went on bitterly. "I came back to find my dogs gone, my sled, half my stores, Charlie dead, he had been dying for a week, and—and that paper. Read it—curse it, read for yourself."

The Indian never once lifted his eyes from the fire, the warmth of which was an endless source of comfort to him. He was thinking, thinking of many things in the deep, silent way of his race.

Tug waited impatiently while the woman devoured the contents of the message. She read it once—twice—even a third time through; and while she read, though her expression remained the same, all her emotions were stirred to fever heat. She was thinking swiftly, eagerly, her brain quickened to a pitch it had never realized before. Her love for Leo was urging her the more fully to grasp the position in which his latest act had placed him.

This outrage against the man, Tug, in no way lessened her concern for her lover, for his welfare. The primitive woman was always uppermost in her. She cared not a jot that Tug had been despoiled. Leo was well, Leo was alive and safe. But was he safe—now?

A sudden alarm along fresh lines startled her. The meaning of what she read took a fresh complexion. Leo had robbed—robbed this man. What must follow if it were known?

For a moment this alarm shuddered through her body. Then she steadied herself. Her mind suddenly became very clear and decided. She suddenly saw her course clear before her, and her voice broke the tense silence round the crackling fire. She read the message for the fourth time. Read it aloud slowly.

As she proceeded the impassive face of the Indian remained unchanged. He was listening—listening acutely, but so still, so indifferent was his attitude that the chafing Tug scarcely realized his presence.

Audie's voice ceased, and for a moment no one spoke. Then with a muttered imprecation Tug held out his hand.

"Give me the —— paper," he cried roughly.

Audie did not appear to hear him.

"Pass it over!" he demanded, still more roughly.

The woman looked up at him. Then she held the paper out, as though to pass it across to his outstretched hand. The next moment it dropped from her fingers and fluttered into the heart of the fire.

With a wild ejaculation Tug sprang to rescue it, but even as he rose to his feet he stood transfixed. The muzzle of a revolver was covering him, and behind the muzzle was the copper-hued visage of the forgotten Si-wash.

"Let 'em burn," he said, in his low guttural tones. "Him writing heap bad med'cine."

The paper curled up and burst into flame. Tug, furious but helpless, watched the hungry flames devour it. Then, as it crumbled away into the red heart of the fire, Si-wash returned to his seat. But his revolver remained upon his knee, and his thin, tenacious fingers gripped the butt of it firmly.

"Si-wash is right," said Audie coldly. She had not risen from her seat. "Leo was foolish to write that. Still, I am glad—now—that he did. It has told me what to do. You see, he said nothing when he went from here, and I thought I should never see him again. Now I know that I shall. Now I know that he is well and safe—yes, safe, since that paper is destroyed. Well"—she looked her visitor squarely in the eyes—"what are you going to do? You are welcome to avail yourself of our transport, as Leo suggests—under conditions."

Tug's fury held him silent. His busy brain was searching for a means to escape from the dictation of this woman, for a means by which to assume domination of the position for himself. As yet he could see none.

So Audie went on with the tacit approval of her faithful comrade.

"You can travel with us, but you will carry no firearms. You see, I don't anticipate that your feelings are particularly kindly toward us. Anyway we'll take no chances. You can go home to your camp now. To-morrow morning, if the weather holds, you can join us. We'll meet you in the open, somewhere near your camp. Mind, in the open, and you'll come to us with your hands up. We shall then search you

for weapons. After that, if things are satisfactory, we'll take your outfit on our sled, and you can travel with us. Remember, Leo's welfare is my one care. Well?"

Tug rose. In a moment the Indian's gun was covering him.

"Look 'im over for gun—now," Si-wash said, addressing Audie in his brief guttural fashion.

Audie nodded.

"You'd best put up your hands, Tug," she said, with a smile, as she rose from her seat. "Si-wash is a dead shot."

Tug obeyed. His hands went slowly up, and Audie passed round the fire, and undid his fur coat. As she did so her eyes sparkled.

"You've got them both on," she said, unstrapping the ammunition belt supporting two revolvers about his waist. "That'll simplify matters. You see, I know them. One is Charlie's, and the other yours. They are the only guns you possess. Good. Now you best go."

But the compelling gun of the Indian could no longer keep Tug silent, and his pent anger broke out in harsh abuse.

"You ——!" he shouted. "You think I can't get back on you, but I can. I will. I'll get your man, Leo, if I wait years. I'll break him—I'll break the life out of him. I'll——"

"Maybe." There was a hard glitter in Audie's eyes as she interrupted him. "One thing, you've got no evidence against him. Charlie is dead, and—that paper is burnt. It is your word against his. When you meet it will be man to man, and I don't guess there's a doubt who's the best man. You best go home now."

Tug made no attempt to obey. He was about to speak again—to hurl some filthy epithet at the woman, who had outwitted him for her love's sake, but the Indian gave him no chance. In a second the threatening gun was raised again.

"Go 'm quick! Dam quick!" Si-wash cried savagely.

Tug's eyes caught the threatening ring of metal. For a moment he hesitated. Then he turned and strode off.

The steady eyes of the Indian watched him until the woods had swallowed him up. Then he turned, and followed silently

in his wake, while Audie remained to dream fresh and more pleasant dreams before the fire.

Half an hour later she looked up as her comrade and champion returned.

"Gone?" she asked, with upraised brows.

"Sho'! Him go." Si-wash crouched down over the fire and spread his hands out to the warmth. Presently he looked up with eyes twinkling with subtle amusement.

"Him big feller, Leo. Good. Him much gold—now. So. Tug him no good. When him find Leo, Leo kill him. Leo big feller."

As he finished speaking a curious sound came from somewhere deep in his throat. And though his impassive face remained unmoved, though not a ghost of a smile was apparent, Audie knew that the man was chuckling with suppressed glee. She, too, felt like laughing, and it was the first time she had so felt since the hideous nightmare of the storm, and its accompanying disaster.

CHAPTER IX

IN SAN SABATANO

San Sabatano was not a big city, but it was a very busy one. At least its citizens thought so, and their four-sheeted two-cent local news-sheet fostered their belief. No doubt a New Yorker would have spoken of San Sabatano as a "Rube" town, an expression which implied extreme provincialism in the smallest possible way. It also implied that its citizens had never turned their eyes upon those things which lay beyond the town-limits, within which they had been "raised." In short, that they knew nothing of the life of the great world about them, except what their paper told them in one single column. Naturally enough one column of the worlds news against twenty or more columns of local interest gave readers a false perspective, especially when every citizen of any local standing usually found a paragraph devoted to his own social or municipal doings.

But then the editor was a shrewd journalist of very wide experience. No, he had not been "raised" in San Sabatano

He had served his apprenticeship on the live journals of the East. He understood men, and the times in which he lived. More than all, he understood making money, and the factor which his women readers were in that process. So the world's news was packed into obscure corners, and San Sabatano was the hub around which his imagination revolved.

So it came about that this individual had for months darkly hinted that the *San Sabatano Daily Citizen* had something up its editorial sleeve with which it intended to stagger humanity, and startle its readers into a belief that an echo of the San Francisco earthquake, or something of that nature, had reached them. He told them that the mighty combination of brain that controlled the *Daily Citizen* and guided San Sabatano public opinion had given birth to an epoch-making thought; a thought which, before long, when the rest of a sluggish world read of it, would lift San Sabatano as a center of enterprise, of learning, of culture, to the highest pinnacle of fame known to the world.

San Sabatano stood agog with breathless expectancy for weeks.

Then came the humanity staggerer.

It occupied a whole page of the *Daily Citizen*. The type was enormous, and had been borrowed for the occasion. Fortunately it came in a slack time. The citizens of San Sabatano had been so long held agog that nothing much else had been doing to afford the editor local copy. Therefore the epoch-making brain wave had full scope, and the use of a prodigal supply of black and red ink.

It was a competition. Yes, a mere competition.

That was the first disappointing thought of everybody. It almost seemed as if the staggering business had fizzled.

Then digestion set in, and hope dawned. Yes, it was not so bad. By Jove! As a competition it was rather good. Good? why, it was splendid! It was magnificent! Wonderful! What was this? A competition for women clerks. Speed and accuracy in stenography and typing. Twelve prizes of equal value. Five hundred dollars each, or a month's trip to Europe, including Paris, Vienna, Berlin, Rome, London. And the final plum of all. The winning twelve to compete among themselves for a special prize in addition. A clerkship in the office of the *Daily Citizen* at

two hundred dollars a month, an office to herself, and a year's contract!

Yes, if he hadn't staggered humanity, the editor had certainly set excitement blazing in hundreds of young feminine hearts, and upset the even tenor of as many homes.

For weeks, pending the trial of skill, that astute individual nursed his scheme and trebled his circulation. Nor was it to be wondered at that many times during the preliminary stages of organization, as he watched the increasing daily returns of his precious paper, he sat back in his creaking office chair and blessed the day he married the wife, whose sister had just won a similar competition somewhere at the other side of the continent.

At the closing of the entries it was found there were just two thousand competitors. Success for the scheme was assured, and quarts of ink told the gaping multitude that this was so.

Then came the day of the competition. It was to be held in the Town Hall. So well was the interest and excitement worked up that, all unpremeditated, half the smaller business houses were closed for the day; a fact duly commented upon in the later issues of the paper.

The competition lasted all day, and it was late at night when the last weary, palpitating competitors finally reached homes, which were still in a state of anxious turmoil.

There was no news of the winners that night. There was none the next morning. Nor the next. The editor knew his business and talked columns in his own praise, and in praise of the manner in which the women of San Sabatano had responded to his invitation.

A week passed, and then a special edition brought the long-awaited announcement which dashed the hopes of one thousand nine hundred and eighty-eight burstling feminine hearts. It was a simple sheet, with a simple heading. No splashes of colored ink. It gave the list of the twelve winners of the competition in dignified type, and invited them to meet at the editor's office at noon next day, to compete for the coveted special prize.

Among the names of the winners was that of Monica Hanson.

The following day Monica attended the final competition.

She did her utmost, spurred on by the driving necessity which had just been thrust upon her brave young shoulders. Now she was sitting in the San Sabatano Horticultural Gardens waiting for the evening issue of the paper which was to tell her, in cold, hard type, the news which was either to crush her eager young soul in despair, or uplift her to realms of ecstatic hope and delight.

Oh, the teeming thought of those straining moments. It flew through her brain with lightning-like velocity, spasmodic, broken. One moment she had visions of pleasures hitherto denied her in a solitary career, eked out on a wholly inadequate pittance doled out to her monthly by her dead mother's solicitors in far-off New York. At another she was obsessed by the haunting conviction that such good fortune was impossible. Yet she felt she had done well in the examination, and, anyway, she would certainly take that five hundred dollars she had already won in preference to the European tour. It would mean so much to her, especially now—now that this fresh call on her resources had been made.

After long disquieting moments she finally sprang up from her seat. Her nerves were getting the better of her. She thought she heard the raucous call of the newsboy. She listened; her pretty brows drawn together in plaintive doubt. Yes, no—her heart was thumping under the white lawn shirt-waist she was wearing, in spite of the fact that it was still winter. But winter in San Sabatano was as pleasant as many another town's summer. In all the history of that beautiful southern Californian town the thermometer had never been known to register freezing point.

She made a pretty picture standing there amid a setting of fantastic tropical vegetation. The cacti, great and small, with their wonder-hued blooms and strange vegetation, were a fitting background to the girl's golden beauty. She was quite southern in her coloring, that wonderful tone of rich gold underlying a fair almost transparent skin. Her waving, fair hair shone with a rich, ruddy burnish, crowning a face of perfect oval, lit with eyes of the deepest blue, which shone with pronounced intelligence and strength.

No, her nerves had not played tricks with her. It was the newsboy. She could see him now, just beyond the park gates. He was selling his papers all too fast. So, with

tumultuous feelings, and a heart hammering violently against her young bosom, she darted off to catch him.

She reached the gates and slackened her pace to a decorous walk. The boy had just handed an elderly man his paper, and was searching for the odd cents of change waited for. Having paid his customer off he looked admiringly up into Monica's pale face.

His shrewd eyes grinned impishly, and he winked abundantly, so that the whole of one side of his face became painfully distorted.

"Say, ain't you Miss Hanson, Miss?" he inquired, with the effrontery of his kind.

Monica's heart beat harder. But she replied with an icy calmness.

"Yes. That's my name. But——"

The boy's eyes sparkled.

"Then I guess the paper is sho' worth 'two bits' to you," he cried, thrusting the folded sheet at her. Then his feelings and covetousness getting the better of him, he added, "Gee, five hundred dollars, an' two hundred a month! Say, how do it feel gettin' all that piled suddenly on to yer, Miss?"

In a flash Monica's dignity had vanished.

"What—what do you mean?" she cried, almost hysterically. "I——" Her fingers trembled so violently that she tore the paper nearly to ribbons struggling to open it in the breeze.

The boy grinned.

"Gar'n. You ain't smart any. Guess you best hand me that 'quarter' an' I'll show you wher' to look."

He was as good as his word, and handed her another paper folded at the right spot, nor, to his credit, did he wait for the money in advance.

"You won it sho'," he said, and waited while in a daze Monica read the wonderful news—

" 'We have much pleasure in announcing that the winner of our Special Prize of a position on our staff at $200 per month is Miss Monica Hanson, whose wonderful speed, etc., etc.' "

Monica waited for no more. Snatching at her satchel she opened it and drew out a single one-dollar bill, and pushed it into the willing hand of the expectant boy.

"Keep the change," he heard her say, as she almost flew down the sidewalk of the tree-shaded main street.

The boy looked after her. Then he looked at his dollar bill.

"Wal, guess she ain't got all the luck goin'," he murmured philosophically, as he pocketed the well-worn note.

Monica hurried on at a pace, though nearly a run, far too slow to suit her mood. Never, never in her life had she felt as she felt now. Never, never. It almost seemed as if the whole world were before her with loving, outstretched arms and smiling face, waiting to yield her all that her young heart most desired. In a vision every face that passed her by in her rush home seemed to be wearing a happy smile. Even the trees overhead rustled whispered messages of delight and hope to her in the evening breeze. This was certainly the one moment of moments in her brief seventeen years of life.

She had hoped, she had dared to hope; but never in her wildest thoughts had she really expected to win this wonderful good fortune. Two hundred dollars a month for a year! Five hundred dollars capital to work upon! And all this added to the pittance which thus far she had lived on while she studied stenography. It was too, too wonderful.

She thought of all she could do with it; and at once there grew on her joyous horizon the first threatening cloud. There was her sister, the dearly loved, erring, actress sister who had come back to her out of those terrible wilds in the far north of Canada.

Thank God this good fortune had come in time to help her. Poor, poor Elsie, or Audrey, as she called herself on the stage. What terrible troubles had been hers. Deserted by the man she loved, left alone with an Indian, and another unfortunate white man, to make her way back to civilization The thought of her sister's sufferings smote her tender young heart even in the midst of her own rejoicings. She had always disliked and feared Indians hitherto, but now, since she had listened to her sister's pitiful story of her husband's leaving her, and of the wonderful loyalty and generosity of the Indian, Si—— what was his name? Ah, yes, Si-wash—somehow she warmed towards them. It seemed wonderful to think of an Indian having such generosity as to give poor

Elsie the money to get to San Sabatano from Juneau out of the payment he had received in advance from the journey from Sixty-mile Creek. Why, it must have taken nearly all he had.

Monica in her impulsive way felt that she would like to repay him, to shake hands with him, and thank him. But her sister had told her that he had gone back into the northern wilderness, which nothing could ever induce him to leave for long.

It was a strange life and tney were strange people. Even her sister had acquired something of the reticence and somberness of the world she had left behind her. Poor Elsie. She seemed to have made such a mess of her life. She had been doing so well, too, in New York. Why had she thrown it all up to marry this man, Leo, and wander off to the Yukon? What a funny name, Leo. It seemed to be his surname, too. Leo; it was all right for a first name, but—Elsie had insisted that it was his name, and the one she liked to call him by.

And now, here she was fretting her poor heart out for him. Oh, it was a shame. Men were perfect brutes. And to leave her under such conditions, and at such a time. She blushed as she thought what she would feel if her husband had left her when she was going to have her first baby. The thought left her anxious. But even her anxiety for her sister was lessened by the knowledge of her own good fortune. She remembered the nurse, who was even now up in the small apartments she occupied, and the doctor she had engaged. A week ago she had trembled at the thought of how she was to pay these people, and provide her sister with even the bare necessities of a confinement. Now, now it was different, and a fresh wave of thankfulness for her good fortune flooded her simple heart.

Yes, her sister should have every care. Everything she could do to make her happy and comfortable should be done. And then, when the baby came, wouldn't it be delightful? She would be its fairy god-mother. She hoped he would be a boy. Fancy Elsie with a son. Wasn't it wonderful? And she—she would give him every moment of her spare time from the office. Ah, that wonderful thought—the office.

So her thoughts ran on, keeping pace with her feet. The wonders of the new world opening out before her eyes were inexhaustible, and long before she was aware of the distance she had covered she found herself at the door of the cheap little apartment house where she lived on the top floor.

There was no elevator, and she ran at the stairs, taking them two at a time. Her good news would not wait. She must tell her poor sister. She was dying to pour all the happy story into her ears, and watch the wistful smile grow upon Elsie's troubled, handsome face.

On the sixth landing she stood breathlessly fumbling in her satchel for her key, when the door opened and the nurse appeared holding up a warning finger.

"Come quietly," she whispered. "The doctor is with her now. It came on quite suddenly. I hope things will be all right, but—she's in a bad way."

In a moment all the joy and hope died out of Monica's tender heart. All the castles, all her dreams, fell into a tumbled ruin. Her sister, her beautiful, brave sister was in danger. She knew it. She knew that the nurse's words covered far more than they expressed. Oh, it was cruel, cruel.

CHAPTER X

A PROMISE

THREE hopeless days since the coming of that brief moment of overwhelming joy. The reaction had been all too terribly sudden for a young girl on the threshold of life. Monica sat at her dying sister's bedside crushed under a great grief.

Those terrible three days. The demands made upon her by the reporters of the *Daily Citizen*. The interviews she had had to endure with the editor. The letters she received. Some from strangers; some from acquaintances. Letters of congratulation; letters full of burning spite from some of the unsuccessful competitors; vampire letters demanding sympathy and practical help, pouring out stories of misery, sorrow and suffering. All these, in her simplicity, she felt

it her duty to answer; and she must answer them with smiling words of hope and comfort. She must at all times keep a smiling face.

To the reporter she had to talk and laugh while her heart was breaking. To the editor she must offer her most engaging smile that his personal goodwill be assured at the outset of her career. Nor, for one moment, did she permit a sign of the aching heart underneath it all.

At the end of those three days she was an older woman by far than twice her seventeen years. She was learning from the book of life in a manner that left her almost despairing. How much she learned. That smiling world she had gazed upon as she ran home with her wonderful news was no longer smiling, its face had resumed its wonted expression which was careworn, lined with suffering, and sorrow, and regret; and was terribly, terribly old. She had learned something of what her success meant. She knew now that her success meant failure to hundreds of others. She knew that so it must always be. The successful path must be lined with a tangle of weeds of suffering and hope abandoned. For every success there must be, not one but hundreds of failures; for such was the law of Life.

Thus she was robbed of her joy and thrown back upon the grief which lay across her own threshold.

The verdict had been given that morning by the doctor; and corroboration of it was in the steady eyes of the nurse. Her sister, her well-loved, admired elder sister was dying. She was dying not as the happy mother of a beautiful son, but as the deserted wife left to starve for all her husband cared. She was dying a broken-hearted creature whose wonderful, generous nature had been made the plaything of a cold, unscrupulous villain. All this Monica told herself over and over again as she sat beside the silent, uncomplaining woman during those long hours of waiting for the end.

Her beautiful eyes were red with weeping, her pale cheeks looked so wan with the long hours of silent watching. The nurse was still there to do her work, but most of her work was now the care of the little life in the bed that had been put up at the other side of the room, rather than with the woman who had given up her life that her love might yield her absent man this one last pledge.

Poor little Monica was alone, utterly alone with her grief. There were no warm words of kindly comfort to soften her troubles. There was no loving mother's gentle hand to soothe her aching head. The world was there before her, hard, unsympathetic. She must face it alone, face it with what courage she might, doing the best she knew amid a grief which seemed everywhere about her.

An infantile cry from the other bed startled her. She rose and passed across the room. The child seemed to be asleep, for its breathing was regular, and the cry was not repeated. She gazed down upon its tiny, crumpled face, and her young heart melted with a curious yearning and love for the little life that was robbing her of a sister. It was so small. It was so tender—and—and it had cost so much. She longed to take it in her arms and press it to her girlish bosom. She loved it. Loved it because it was her sister's and soon would be all she had in the world to remind her of the generous heart from which life was so swiftly ebbing.

"Monica!"

The girl started and looked round. The dying woman's eyes were wide open.

"Come here." The voice was low, but the words were quite distinct. It was the first time she had spoken for more than twelve hours.

Monica passed swiftly back to her place at the bedside.

"Oh, Elsie, Elsie," she cried, "I'm so glad you have spoken. So, so glad."

A faint smile flickered gently over the sick woman's emaciated features.

"Are you?"

"Yes, yes. Oh, Elsie, you feel better, stronger, don't you? Say you feel better. I—I know you do."

Monica's last words came hesitatingly, for even while she was speaking a negative movement from the sick woman told her how vain were her hopes.

"It is no use, Mon. But I'm perfectly easy—now. That's why I called you. I want to talk about—him. You—you—love my little son, don't you?" There was pleading in the voice as the woman asked the question. "I saw you bending over him just now, and—and I thought—hoped you did."

"Oh, Elsie, he is yours. How could I help but love him?"

The words came impulsively, and Monica dropped a warm hand upon the transparent flesh of her sister's. Her action was promptly rewarded by a feeble pressure of acknowledgment.

"I—I knew you would."

After that neither spoke for some moments. Tears were softly falling down Monica's pretty cheeks. But her sister's eyes were closed again. It was almost as if she were gathering her strength and thoughts for a final effort.

Presently Monica grew alarmed. She dashed the tears from her eyes, and bent over the bed.

"Shall I fetch nurse? Is there anything I can do?" she asked eagerly.

The big eyes opened at once, and the light in them was a calm smile. The dying woman looked almost happy. To Monica's growing understanding of such things her happiness might have been the inspiration of one who sees beyond the narrow focus of human life; whose swiftly approaching end had revealed to her tired eyes a glimpse of the wonderful world she was approaching, that golden life awaiting all, be they saint or sinner.

"I don't want any one but you, dear—now." The voice was tired, but a sense of peace was conveyed in the gentle pressure of her thin fingers upon the soft warm flesh of her sister's hand. "I—I want to tell you of—things. And—and I want you to promise me something. Oh, Mon, as you love me, as you love my boy, I want you to give me your promise."

Monica seated herself on the edge of the bed and tearfully gave her promise with all the impulsiveness which her love inspired.

"You only have to tell me what it is. I could promise you anything, Elsie. I have only one desire in the world now; it is to—to help you."

Her sister's eyes closed for a moment. Then they opened again.

"Raise me up a little, dear. Put a pillow behind my shoulders. I want to—to—see the bed over there. I want to see my little son, his—his boy. That's better." She sighed contentedly as Monica raised her up, and her big eyes at once fixed themselves upon the other bed. There was nothing to

be seen but the carefully arranged bed clothes, but, for the time at least, it was sufficient.

"I want to tell you the things I never told you before. I want to tell you about Leo; and I want to talk about my—my boy. Leo and I were not married."

A little gasp of horrified dismay escaped the young girl. She was so young that as yet her ideals of life were still intact. The thought of such a thing as her sister now spoke of had never entered her innocent head.

"Ah, that—that hurts you," the other went on. "I knew it would. I—I—that's why I lied to you before. I lied when I said Leo was my husband. Oh, Mon, don't let it make any difference to us now. The time is getting so short."

"Nothing could ever make any difference between us," Monica said, in a low voice. "I was startled. You see——"

"I know. Ah, my dear, my dear, you don't know what it is to love as I love. I met Leo a long time ago, when I was an actress. He knew me as Audrey Thorne, an actress, and I—I wanted to marry him. But—you see he had nothing on which to keep a wife—an extravagant woman as I was then. So, he went away, and—and I followed him. You must think me utterly, terribly bad—but I loved him. I followed him right up into the wilds of the Yukon, and—and I lived with him."

"Poor, poor Elsie." Monica's dismay had passed, and she gently squeezed the hand she was still holding. The pressure seemed to give the other courage to proceed.

"You mustn't pity me too much. I—I was very happy. I was very happy until I knew about—my little son. It was then that I realized the awful sin I had committed. It was then I knew the cruel wrong I had done to that unborn life. I—I think I was nearly distracted when it all came upon me." Her voice had risen. It was almost strident with emotion. "For weeks I thought and thought what I could do to remedy my wrong, and at last I took my courage in both hands. I told Leo, and—and asked him to marry me—for the child's sake."

"For the child's sake?"

The admission which the words implied filled the simple Monica with something like panic.

"You see, Leo never loved me as I loved him."

"Oh, Elsie, Elsie!"

"Yes, dear, I forced myself upon him."

The tragedy of her sister's life had almost overwhelmed the girl. The whole pitiful story wrung her heart with its pathos, its shame. Her sister. Her beautiful, clever sister. Oh, it was too, too dreadful.

After a while Elsie roused herself again. There was a lot yet to be said, and she knew her time was short.

"I am all to blame. You mustn't blame Leo," she said earnestly. "He was a good man to me. I know you think he has deserted me. But he hasn't. That is not him. He promised to marry me, and, had I lived, he would have kept that promise. We were coming down country for that purpose." She paused. "Then something happened which made it necessary for him to go on ahead. That's how I came to make the journey with the Indian. It—it couldn't be helped. You—you mustn't blame Leo. He will be looking for me. Is very likely looking for me now. But it is too late. That is why I want you to promise me something."

Monica waited. She could find nothing to say. She was learning another of the bitter lessons which life has to teach when the book is once opened. Presently the other went on—

"You see, neither of us can now remedy the wrong I have done my little son. As I said, it is too late. I shall be gone before Leo can marry me." The big eyes became eager. They looked up with piteous straining into the gentle face before them. "Do you see? Oh, Mon, do you understand? My boy—our boy has no father; and very, very soon will have no mother. Oh, Mon, what can I do, what can I say? Can—can you help me?"

But Monica was gazing helplessly before her. The warmth of her love for her erring sister was no less. But she was thinking, thinking, striving with all her might to seek a solution to the painful tangle of her poor sister's life.

"I—I—can't—— Tell me, Elsie—tell me anything I can do for him. I don't seem able to think for myself," she cried hopelessly at last.

Something of Monica's difficulty seemed to communicate itself to the other. Her brows drew together in perplexity

"It is so hard," she said suddenly. "I have thought and thought, and I can only see one possible hope—only one. That hope is—you."

"How? Oh, Elsie, tell me how. What can I do?"

With a sudden effort the mother propped herself up with her elbows behind her. Her dying eyes were burning bright with feverish light. All the hope of her poor dying soul looked up into her sister's face as her final appeal rushed to her lips.

"How? Why, why, by taking him as your own son. How? Oh, Mon, his own mother is taken from him. Then give him another. Make him your own child—whose father is dead. It would be easy for you. You married young, and your—your husband died—died at sea. He will never know differently. No one will question it. Oh, my dear, don't you see? Bring him up as your own child, born in wedlock, and never let him know his mother's shame. Promise me, your sacred promise to a dying woman, that he shall never know, through you, his mother's shame, and his own disgrace. Promise it to me, Mon, it is the only thing that can give me peace now. Forget everything I have told you. Forget the disgrace I have brought on you. Forget everything except—except only your promise. Promise! Promise!"

Her fingers tightened almost painfully upon Monica's hand. She was laboring under a fierce emotion, almost sufficient to bring on a collapse. The feverish eyes were bloodshot, and a hectic flush burned on her thin cheeks.

The impulse of the moment was upon Monica, and she leaned forward. Her other hand was tenderly raised to the woman's moist brow, in a loving, soothing manner.

"I promise, dear; I promise on my sacred word that what you ask me shall be done. Henceforth he shall be my son. Nor shall he ever know through me the cruel wrong the world has done to you. I promise you, Elsie, dear, freely, freely. And all my life I will strive to keep the real truth of his birth from him."

"Thank God!"

The reaction was terrible. The dying woman fell back on her pillows, and her features suddenly became so ghastly that Monica sprang from her seat in wild alarm. She ran

to the door to summon the nurse. But the voice from the bed stayed her.

"No, Mon, not yet." Then the dying woman added with an irresistible appeal, "Give me my boy, for—for a few minutes. After that——"

Monica ran to obey with an only too thankful heart. But her instinct warned her that the end was not far off. She laid the sleeping child tenderly by its mother's side, and placed her thin arm gently under its shoulders. She felt maybe she was doing wrong, but—poor Elsie.

Elsie's eyes thanked her, but her voice remained silent. And for a long while there was an unbroken quiet in the room.

Monica moved to the window and stood with her back turned to the bed. Somehow she felt that these moments were too sacred for another's eyes to witness. Slowly fresh tears gathered in her eyes, tears of sympathy and love, and one by one they rolled unheeded, slowly down her cheeks. And as they fell the last moments of her sister's life ebbed peacefully away.

CHAPTER XI

TWO STRANGERS IN SAN SABATANO

Monica's life suddenly became filled to overflowing. She was no longer a child, but a woman of a maturity that was almost absurd in one so young. The happy, irresponsible girlhood she had so long enjoyed in her mother's modest uptown apartment had quite gone. Whatever the future might hold of happiness for her, certainly freedom from the more serious cares of life would never again be hers.

Five years ago she and her mother had bade Elsie good-bye in the same humble apartment, when the elder girl had left San Sabatano to go on the stage in New York. Monica was twelve then. Twelve; and her young eyes and younger mind were filled with a boundless envy and admiration for the beautiful sister who was to bask in the wonderful limelight of the stage, and wear clothes far beyond the beauty of all

dreams; and jewels—jewels, whose splendor was incomparable to the beauty of her lovely, lovely Elsie. Had she only known it she was very near the truth when she thought of the jewels her sister would wear.

Her mother was one of those quietly good women who contrive to inspire their children with something of their own qualities by example rather than precept. Neither Elsie nor Monica ever knew what it was to receive one of those harsh reprimands so common among mothers of less understanding, of less ability. Her children must grow up guided rather than driven. All their lives this had been her method. Therefore it came as a terrible shock to her when the more wayward of the two, perhaps, in a sense, the bolder spirit of the two, suddenly announced her intention of leaving the sheltering dovecote, where money was never very plentiful, to earn her living in the flamboyant world of the stage.

True to her methods, and with, perhaps, a deeper understanding of her child, and the uselessness of refusal, the mother's permission was not long withheld. It was a reluctant enough permission, but given without any outward sign of the disapproval she really felt. Moreover, she was convinced of the rightness of her attitude. The girl, she knew, would live her life as she understood it. Her only duty remaining, therefore, was to equip her with all the knowledge of the world that lay within her simple range of understanding. For the rest the child's fate was in the lap of the gods.

But she never seemed to quite get over the parting. For a long time she bore up with great fortitude, and her devotion to Monica became a wonderful thing. It was almost as if she feared that she, too, her one remaining child, might be taken from her, and swallowed up by the hungry maw of the outside world.

She heard regularly from Elsie for some time. Elsie was getting on quite well. Then letters became less frequent. And, finally, about the time that Elsie met Leo, they ceased altogether. It was then that the signs of break-up began to show in the patient woman at home.

She had died quietly and quickly of heart failure just a year ago. Monica's grief was profound. But she was too young for any lasting effect to remain with her. She lived on in the apartment without any thought of leaving it. The

whole thing seemed the most natural in the world to her. Her mother's solicitor wrote her, and offered her a home with his family, but, with prompt decision, she refused it. She told him that if her mother's affairs permitted it, she would rather remain in San Sabatano, where she had all her girlhood's friends, than break new ground among strangers. Her mother's affairs yielded her the barest living, so she remained, determined to make a way for herself in the world, her own world, as other girls of her acquaintance had done.

Now she had reached the second, and, in many ways, the greater change in her life. Where, before, only her childish affections had been bruised and crushed at her mother's death, now she realized that she had all too suddenly passed from the sunlit paths of innocent childhood, to the harsher road down which all the world was journeying; struggling, jostling, each striving to seize for themselves the easier, the pleasanter paths along which to make the journey of life.

But the change in her was subtle. There was no outward effect, there was no disturbing of the wholesome, happy nature that was the very essence of her being. The change was in an added knowledge, a quickening of naturally alert faculties. She realized that some strange force had suddenly plunged her into the midst of a life which demanded quick thought and swift action, so that her pulses might be kept beating in perfect time to the pace at which life sped on about her.

She realized that she had suddenly become one of life's workers, and that grave responsibility was already knocking at her door. From the very beginning she accepted the new conditions gladly. She felt an added zest to the fact of living. The old days of dreaming were gone. Every moment of her waking hours was filled with thought, keen, practical thought; and the demand thus made on her found her ready and able. There was no fluster, no confusion of any sort. Her healthy brain was quick and incisive, characteristics quite unsuspected even by herself. Not only was this so, but, with the added pressure, there came a quiet desire to test her newly discovered powers to the uttermost.

There were other changes, too, changes of almost equal importance. She found herself witnessing the progress of affairs about her with an entirely new understanding of them.

All her understanding of the precepts of her youth received revision; a revision which was inspired by the story her sister had told her on her deathbed. The shock at first had been a little overwhelming, but, young as she was, her ready brain quickly assimilated the facts, and set itself to the task of readjusting its focus.

There was no bitterness, no horror at her discoveries. She simply realized that here was a small slice of life cut out by the same ruthless knife which no doubt served hundreds of similar purposes among the rest of mankind. Who was she to criticize, who was she to condemn? Her knowledge was all to come, and maybe, as she went on, she would discover that such tragedies were part of the real life which up to now had been entirely hidden from her.

She had no blame for her dead sister. Her memory was as sacred to her as if she had lived the most perfect life of purity under the social laws governing man's relationship to woman. Her love once given was not a thing to be promptly rescinded by the failure of its idol. The idol might fall, and become besmirched in the unsuspected mire, but her frank, kindly hands were ready to set it up again and again, and perhaps in time her broader knowledge would teach her how to secure it from further disaster.

Perhaps the first real warning of the change in her came at the moment she considered her sister's funeral. Here undoubtedly a shock was awaiting her, and, in a moment, there leaped into her focus a teeming picture of almost endless complications. Just for an instant all her nerves were set jangling, and an utter helplessness left her painfully distressed. Then the feeling as abruptly passed, her mind cleared, and, one by one, she found herself reviewing each detail of the situation, and marking out the course she must adopt.

First and foremost her sacred promise to the dying woman stood out in all its nakedness, entirely robbed of its cloak of impulse and affection, in which it had been clad at the time of its making. And from that promise, radiating in every direction, she saw boundless possibilities for more than unpleasant consequences.

She knew she must make up her mind swiftly, and she did so in an astonishing manner. A sleepless night found her

in the morning ready with her plans all clear in her mind. She still had nearly three weeks before taking up her new position in the office of the *Daily Citizen.* This would be ample time to put everything in order. It was necessary to take the doctor into her confidence. He had been their doctor for as long as she could remember. He had attended her mother in her last illness, and knew their whole family history as well as she knew it herself. Therefore she did not anticipate any difficulty with him.

So the third morning after her sister's death she visited him at his house, and confided sufficient of her sister's story to him to enlist his sympathy, without any breach of the confidence reposed in her. She pointed out her own position, and begged his help in hushing the whole matter up.

Dr. Bernard Strong was a man of wide sympathy and understanding, and in giving his promise of help, pointed out the gravity of the position which her quixotic promise had placed her in.

"My dear," he said, "this is almost a terrible business for you. Here you are, bound to this town for at least a year, with a newly born infant in your care, which you cannot explain away, without breaking your promise to poor Elsie. You are known. You have many friends. What in the world are you going to do?"

It was then that Monica dispayed the quick, incisive working of her suddenly aroused mental faculties. She told him in brief, pointed words the plans she had made during the long, wakeful night.

"It does not seem so—so very difficult," she said.

Then she plunged into the details of her schemes. She pointed out that her tenement was a weekly one, which she could get rid of as soon as Elsie was buried. This she would do. Then she would take rooms far out on the outskirts of the town. She would first find a house for the baby in the country, a few miles out, where he was not likely to be brought into contact with the townsfolk. That would be a start. After that she would meet any emergency as it arose. The help she wanted from him was to arrange the funeral, with all the secrecy possible, and see that the law was complied with in regard to the baby. His registration, etc.

The quick practical manner in which she detailed all the

minor details to this man of experience filled him with a profound admiration, and he told her so.

"It is astounding to me, Monica," he said kindly, "that you, a girl of seventeen, can handle such a matter in the calm manner you are doing. Perfectly astounding. You certainly ought to do well in this business career you are about to begin. Really you have made things seem less—er—formidable. But, my dear child, I feel I must warn you. You see, I am so much older," he went on, with a smile. "I have seen so much of the world—the sadder side of the world, that I cannot let this moment pass without telling you of the rocks I can see ahead, waiting to break up your little boat. Your tale of an early marriage and all that, if the boy becomes associated with you in the minds of people in the town, will never do. At once they will think the worst, and then—what of your position on the *Daily Citizen?* Then when the time comes for you to marry? What then?"

"I shall never marry—now," was Monica's prompt and decided reply.

The doctor shook his head.

"It is so easy to say that. Believe me, my dear, you have tied a millstone about your neck that will take your utmost strength to bear. I even doubt if you will be able to bear it for long. You are about to embark on a career of falsehood which will find you out at almost every turn. It is quite terrible to think of. Poor Elsie did you the greatest wrong, the greatest injury, when she extracted that promise from you. And," he added, with a wry smile, "I fear, from my knowledge of you, you will carry it out to the bitter end—until it utterly overwhelms you."

Monica stepped off the veranda of the doctor's house with none of the lightness of gait with which she had mounted it. She realized the gravity of her position to the full now, and knew that, without breaking her sacred word to a dying woman, there was no means of remedying it. But she was quite determined, and walked away with her pretty lips tightly compressed, her blue eyes gazing out unflinchingly before her. Nothing should turn her from her purpose. It was Elsie's trust to her. It was the cross she had to bear. Come what might she would bear it to the end, even if at the last its weight were to crush the very life out of her.

The next three weeks passed rapidly. Monica had no time to look back upon the trouble which had so involved her, she had little enough time to gaze ahead into the wide vista of troublous rocks the doctor had promised her. In fact she had no time at all for anything but the crowding emergencies of the moment, and keeping the well-meaning friends and curious neighbors as far from the secrets of her inner life as possible.

Nor was it easy; and without Dr. Strong's help many of her difficulties would have been well-nigh insurmountable. But he was as good, and even better, than his word. The whole of the funeral was achieved without any unnecessary publicity, and Monica and the doctor were the only mourners. Then the latter found a home for the boy on a farm, three miles out of the town, where a newly born babe had just died, and so, in the end, everything was accomplished just as Monica had planned, without one unnecessary question being asked. Thus, by the time the winner of the special prize took up her duties in the office of the *Daily Citizen*, of all San Sabatano Dr. Strong alone shared Monica Hanson's secret. A secret, it was her future object in life to keep entirely hidden from the world.

Monica entered upon her duties with a lighter heart than she had known for weeks. Everything was as she could wish it. All traces of her sister's shame had been carefully covered. Practically no sign was left to delight the prying eyes of the curious scandalmongers. Her future lay before her, wide, and, to her, illimitable.

Her aims and ambitions were fixed plainly in her mind. She must succeed; she must rise in the commercial world; she must make money. These things were not for herself. No, she required so little. They were for him, for the little life so cruelly wronged at its very outset. Henceforth her own life would be devoted to his. Her whole thought would be for him and his welfare, not only for the child's sake, but in memory of the love she had borne her dead sister.

How well the editor of the *Daily Citizen* had judged the competitors for the special prize was quickly demonstrated. Monica's zeal was backed by the suddenly aroused acuteness of an unusually clever brain, and, before a month had passed, the complacent individual in the editorial chair had excellent

reason for again congratulating himself. He had intended from the outset that the winner of the princely prize and unusual salary should earn every cent of it, but he found in his new clerk an insatiable hunger for work, and a capacity for simple organization quite astounding, and far beyond any demand he could make on it.

In this beginner he quickly detected a highly developed germ of commercial instinct; that germ so coveted, so rare. He tried her in many ways, seeking in a more or less fumbling way for the direction in which her abilities most surely pointed. Stenography and typing, he quickly saw, were mere incidents to her. She had other and larger abilities. Frequently in dictating letters he found himself discussing matters pertaining to them with her, and she never failed to center her mental eye upon the point at issue, driving straight to the heart of the matter in hand. The man was frankly delighted with her, and, in the shortest possible time, she became a sort of confidential secretary, whose views on the organization of his paper were often more than useful to him.

It was about this time that the editor's sanctum was invaded by a stranger; a big stranger of quite uncommon appearance. The man was simply dressed in good store clothes, which covered a powerful, burly figure. But the chief interest lay in the man's face and head. It was a strong face. To use Mr. Meakin's own description of him to his young clerk some time later, he possessed a "tow head and a face like emery cloth."

He gave no name, in fact he refused his name. He came to insert an advertisement in the paper, and to consult the editor upon the matter.

His objects were so definite that, in spite of the refusal to give his name, Mr. Meakin decided to see him. Monica was away at dinner, or he would probably have turned him over to her. However, when the man finally appeared the editorial mind was pleased at the study his unusual personality offered him.

The stranger very nearly filled up the doorway as he entered the inner office.

"Guess you're the editor?" he began at once, dropping into the chair Mr. Meakin kicked towards him.

"Sure," Mr. Meakin was always sparing of words to strangers.

"Ah."

Then, so long did the man remain silent that the editor found it necessary to spur him on by a method he usually adopted in such cases. He pressed the button of his dummy telephone with his foot. The bell rang out, and he lifted the receiver to his ear.

"Hullo! Who is it? Oh, that you, Allards? Oh, is it important? Well, I'm engaged just now. I shan't be three minutes. Yes, I'll come right along then. Goo'-bye!"

He looked across at his visitor as he put the receiver up.

"Sorry to interrupt you. I didn't just get what you said."

A flicker of a smile passed across the visitor's serious face.

"It's of no consequence," he said. "Guess I must have been thinking aloud. You see it's kind of a fool trick having the button of that dummy 'phone in sight under the table. Guess the feller who fixed it was a 'mutt.' "

"Eh?" Mr. Meakin's face went suddenly scarlet. He was about to make a hasty reply, but changed his mind, and laughed with a belated sense of humor.

"It's served its purpose anyhow," he said genially. "What can I do for you?"

The stranger responded to his humor at once.

"Don't guess you can do much. Maybe you can tell me a deal. I'm looking for some one whose lately come to this city. A lady. Maybe you get a list of visitors to this city in your paper."

"At the hotels—yes."

"Ah, I don't guess she's stopping at an hotel. Came to visit her sister. Her name's Audrey Thorne."

"Audrey Thorne," Mr. Meakin searched the back cells of memory. He seemed to have heard the name at some time or other, but for the life of him he could not recall where.

"Guess I'm not wise," he said at last, with a thoughtful shake of his head, while he eyed his visitor shrewdly. "Anyway, if I knew of the lady, tain't up to me to hand information to a stranger—without a name."

The stranger promptly rose from his seat.

"Just so," he said, with a sharp clip of his powerful jaws.

"I'll ask you to read this over," he went on, producing a sheet of paper from his pocket, "and say what it'll cost to have it in your news-sheet for a week."

He handed the paper across the desk, and Mr. Meakin admired the bold handwriting in which the advertisement was set out.

" 'Will Audie send her address to Box 4926 P. O. Winnipeg? Sign letter in full name.—Leo.' "

Mr. Meakin read it over twice. Then he looked up keenly.

"Guess it'll cost you ten dollars," he said. "Sunday edition two dollars extra. In advance."

The stranger paid out the money without comment and moved towards the door. Then he looked back.

"There'll be no mistake. It's particular," he said deliberately.

"There'll be no mistake."

"Thanks." The stranger pocketed the receipt for the money with some care.

The door closed behind the man who signed himself as "Leo," and Mr. Meakin heard him pass down the passage to the outer office. Then he turned to the stack of local copy at his elbow.

He was quite used to strange visits from stranger people, so he thought no more of the matter until nearly an hour later when Monica returned from her dinner.

As she entered the wholesome, airy apartment, with its soft carpet and comfortable furniture, he looked up quickly.

"Say, Miss Hanson," he said, holding out a pile of proofed copy. "This needs classifying. It goes in tomorrow's issue. Get it through before four. Say, and you might hand this in to the advertisement department. A guy with a tow-head, and a face like emery cloth handed me twelve dollars for a week—and Sunday. Reckon he's chasin' up his lady friend, and she's guessin' to lie low."

He passed her Leo's advertisement, and went on with his work.

Monica waited for any further instructions to come, and, as she stood, glanced down at the sheet of paper containing the advertisement. In a moment her attention was riveted upon it, and a sickening feeling stole through her whole body.

Then her pulses were set hammering with a nervousness she could not control, and she felt faint.

At that moment Mr. Meakin happened to look up.

"Well?" he inquired.

Then he became aware of the pallor of the pretty face he was accustomed to admire, when Mrs. Meakin was safely within the walls of their home on the outskirts of the city.

"Say, you're not well," he exclaimed kindly.

Monica promptly pulled herself together.

"It's—it's just the heat," she stammered. "I'll—go and see to these. Anything else?"

"Nothin' else just now. Say, don't worry too much if the heat——"

But Monica had fled before he finished his well-intentioned admonition. Once in her own office she flung herself into the chair at her desk, and sat staring at the ominous sheet of paper.

"Leo!" she muttered. "Whatever am I to do? Whatever am I to do?"

For a long time the pile of copy remained untouched while she struggled with the problem confronting her. She viewed it from every aspect. And with each fresh view it troubled her the more. What was her duty? What was the right course to pursue? This man was Leo. Elsie's Leo. She had no doubt of it. Leo, the father of Elsie's boy. If Elsie had lived she would have welcomed him. But Elsie was dead. Elsie was dead and carried with her her promise never to let the child know his mother's shame. Ought she to tell the father of this child? Ought she to give him up? It would be an easy way out of all her difficulties. Yet she had promised to bring him up as her own.

No, she would not give the boy up. It was plainly her duty to keep him, and—yes, she knew it—her desire. But equally she had a duty of some sort to fulfil by this man. He must not be left in ignorance of Elsie's death. He must be told that or he would haunt this town, and become an everlasting source of disquiet to her. Yes, there was a duty to herself as well. She must safeguard herself; safeguard the child. And with this conclusion came an inspiration. She would write to him on her typewriter, and leave the letter unsigned.

So she passed the advertisement on to its department, and, on a plain sheet of paper, sent the briefest possible message to the post office, Winnipeg.

"Audie died in child birth."

There was neither heading nor signature, and she determined to have it mailed from another town. The more she considered it the more her message pleased her. She was keeping her promise to her sister, and fulfilling what she believed to be her duty to the man. He had asked for news of Elsie; well, here was news which was the exact truth.

Her work was duly completed by four o'clock, and she awaited a call from Mr. Meakin. There would be a number of letters to take down, she knew, when his editorial work was finished for the day. In the meantime she had leisure to reflect upon the visit of the man, Leo.

It was curious. Almost a coincidence that he should call when she was out. Had she been in it would have fallen to her duty to have interviewed him first. As it was she had missed seeing him. It was a pity. She ought to have seen him. Yes, she would have given half a month's salary to have seen him——

A bell rang; but it was not Mr. Meakin's bell. It was from the outer office. She took up the 'phone at once. Could it be——?

"Hello! Oh! Some one to see Mr. Meakin? Who is it? What's that? Austin Leyburn? What's that? He's dressed funny? All right, send him in to me. Right."

Monica put up the receiver and waited. It was not Leo, and she was disappointed. Austin Leyburn. She didn't know the name.

There was a knock at the door, and, in answer to the girl's summons, it was thrown open by the small boy who piloted visitors.

"Mr. Austin Leyburn, Miss!"

Monica indicated a chair as the door closed behind her visitor. He took it without hesitation, and she found herself gazing upon a most extraordinary object. He was obviously a powerfully built man with a keen, alert face and narrow eyes. He was smiling at her with a curiously ironical smile which rather annoyed her. But his general appearance was deplorable. His clothes were so unclean and ragged that,

even among tramps, she never remembered seeing anything quite like them. They were patched and torn again in a dozen different places, and it would have been impossible to have described their original color with any accuracy. Yes, there could be no doubt he was a tramp of some sort. Yet when he spoke his manner was not that of a tramp. However, as a precaution, Monica kept her foot over a push button which did not belong to a dummy 'phone.

"If you'll state your business, I'll inquire if Mr. Meakin will see you," she said, in her most business-like way. "He's very busy. You see, the paper will be going to press soon."

"I don't guess I need to worry the boss if you happen to know about things." The man's manner was sharp, but his smile remained. Monica became interested. There was nothing of the usual whine of the tramp here.

"I deal with all inquiries," she said simply.

"Confidential?"

"That depends on the nature of the confidence."

"Ah. Maybe what I'm after won't be reckoned confidential."

"If you'll——"

"Just so, Miss. Well, see here, maybe it isn't a heap except to me. I'm after a feller who calls himself Leo," he said distinctly. Monica started. The man's quick, smiling eyes saw the start and drew his conclusions. "I see you know him. I knew he'd been here. Came this morning. You see he's after a woman belonging to this city. I guessed he'd get around. I'm on his trail and want him bad. Maybe you can put me wise where he's stopping?"

Monica shook her head with a calmness she was by no means feeling.

"I shouldn't tell you if I knew. You're quite right, I know the man—by name, but that's all. You see, we know many people by name—but there our information to strangers ends."

"So." Mr. Leyburn eyed her coldly. "Maybe Mr. Meakin, as you call him, will——"

"Mr. Meakin will tell you no more. In fact, if this is your business Mr. Meakin will not see you."

Monica pressed the bell under her foot.

The man laughed harshly.

"Well, it don't matter. Guess I'll come up with him sooner or later. Maybe he'll look into this office again another day." He rose, and his hard eyes shone with a metallic gleam. "If he does—you can just tell him that Tug is on his heels. He's looking for him bad. So he best get busy. Good-day."

The small boy threw open the door, and stood aside to allow the visitor to pass out. Nor, in spite of the curious threat in the man's words, could Monica help a smile at the impish manner in which the boy held his nose as the man passed by him.

The stranger's visit left an unsavory flavor behind him. Monica was disturbed, and sat thinking hard. She was striving hard to raise the curtain which shut out her view of the life lying behind all these people. She was striving to visualize something of that life with which poor Elsie had so long been associated. A number of vague pictures hovered before her mind's eye, but they were indistinct, unreal. She could not see with eyes of knowledge. How could she? Was not this life belonging to another world. A world she had never beheld, never been brought into contact with? No, it was useless to try to penetrate those dark secrets which she felt lay hidden behind the curtain she was powerless to draw aside.

Yet she knew these things had not come to her to be set aside and forgotten. They had come to her for a purpose. What was that purpose? She tried to see with her sister's eyes. What would Elsie have done, with Leo—threatened? Ah, that was it; that was the purpose. Her sister's responsibility had devolved upon her. Elsie would have taken some action to help—Leo. What would she have done?

She thought and puzzled for a long time. Then she pressed the bell under her desk once more. An inspiration had come.

When the boy appeared she demanded the proofs of the day's advertisements.

She waited impatiently until the boy returned, and then kept him waiting while she hastily extracted the one she required from the pile. She read it over carefully. Leo had worded it to suit her purpose well. Suddenly she took up her blue pencil. She dashed out the word "Winnipeg" and

substituted "Toronto" in its place. And without another glance at it handed the papers back to the boy.

"That's all," she said briefly.

But the boy was full of the impertinence of his kind.

"Toronto?" he read. "Say, Miss, ain't that the place they have ice palaces an' things?" he demanded, with a grin.

Monica was in no mood to answer his questions.

"Take them back," she said sharply.

As the boy slouched off she leaned back in her chair with a sigh of relief. She had done her best to put the man calling himself Tug off the track of his quarry.

PART II

CHAPTER I

AFTER EIGHTEEN YEARS

Monica Hanson stood in front of the full-length mirror in her bedroom. For a long time she stood viewing her fair reflection with a smile at once half humorous, half tearful.

Thirty-five!

It sounded terrible as she muttered the age she knew herself to be. Thirty-five! Yet the perfect blue eyes were not a day older, as they looked back at her out of the glass. There was no hardening in their depths; there were no gathering lines about their fringed lids. Perhaps there was a deeper, wiser look in them; a look suggesting a wider knowledge, a more perfect sympathy with the life into which they had peeped during her years of struggling. But there was no aging in them. The rich, ripe mouth, too, so wonderfully firm, yet gentle, the broad, intelligent forehead with its fair, even brows. There was not one single unsightly line to disfigure these features which displayed so much of the strong character which lay behind them. Her wealth of fair, wavy hair, which since her earliest days had been her one little conceit, her constant joy and pride, was faultlessly dressed, nor had she ever yet found in its midst one of those silver threads whose discovery never fails to strike terror into the heart of an aging woman.

No, she beheld nothing in her reflection to cause her a single pang, a single heartache. Yet her heart was aching; and the pain of it was in the smile which came back to her from her reflection.

Had Monica only known it, the years had been more than kind to her. With a little more womanly vanity she would have understood that her girlish attractions had been increased a hundredfold. Not only had the years matured her figure to perfections which can never belong to early youth, but they had endowed her with a beauty of soul and mind, far more rarely found in one of such unusual physical attraction.

But such ponderings before her glass were useless, perhaps harmful. It was all so impossible. So she turned away with a little impatient gesture, and, picking up the letter lying on her bed, she passed through the folding doors into her sitting-room beyond.

The winter sun was shining in through frosty windows; that wonderful winter sun which brightens and makes joyous the Canadian dead season, without shedding sufficient warmth to disturb the thermometer from its despairing depths of cold.

She crossed to the window, and stood beside the heat radiator while she read her letter for perhaps the twentieth time. It was quite short, and intensely characteristic of the writer. Monica understood this. The lack of effusion in no way blinded her to the stormy passion which had inspired it.

"Dear Monica:

"I am going to call on you at 4 o'clock this afternoon, if you have no objection. If you have, 'phone me. I simply cannot rest until the subject of our talk the other night is settled.

"Yours,

"Alexander Hendrie."

There was a wistful longing in her eyes as the woman looked up from the brief note. The subject of their talk. He could not rest. Had she rested, or known peace of mind since that evening? She knew she had not. She knew that come what might that calm which belongs to a heart untouched by love could never again be hers. She knew that love, at last, had come knocking at the door of her soul; nor had it knocked in vain, in spite of the impossibility of it all. She had not 'phoned. Instead she had spent two hours over her toilet to receive the man who was her employer, and had now become her lover.

No one knew better than she the happiness that might have been hers in her newly found regard for this great wheat grower of Alberta, had things only been different. She loved him; she had admired him ever since she came into his employ, but now she loved him with all the long-pent

passion of a woman who has for years deliberately shut the gates of her soul to all such feelings.

She knew her love must be denied. There was no hope for it.

The trials she had gone through for the sake of her pledge to her dying sister were far too vividly in her mind to leave her with any hope for this love of hers. She must crush it out. She must once more steel herself, that her faith with the dead might be kept.

She dropped upon the ottoman beside the window, and, gazing out on Winnipeg's busy main street, gave herself up to profound thought. Her incisive brain swiftly became busy, reviewing the career which had been hers since—since young Frank, her beloved boy, the child who had cost her a sister's life, had become her one object and care.

Her deep eyes grew introspective, and her pretty lips closed firmly.

She had not traveled an easy road during those years. Far from it. The rocks prophesied by the kindly doctor had been quickly realized. They had come well-nigh to wrecking her craft at the outset. Only that its ribs were so stout, and the heart that guided it so strong, it must inevitably have been doomed.

So much for her youthful conceit; so much for the boundless optimism of her years. She was caught among the very first shoals that presented themselves in the ebb tide of her fortunes six months before the completion of her contract on the *Daily Citizen*. Would she ever forget the —yes, tragedy of that moment? She thought not.

Everything had gone along so smoothly. Her fears had been lulled. There was no sign to point the coming of the disaster. Yes, that was it. There had been overconfidence. The complications at her sister's death had been forgotten. There had been no unpleasant developments to remind her of the pitfalls with which she was surrounded. So she had grown careless in her confidence. In the warmth of her girl's heart, her rapidly growing love for the little life in her charge, she found herself spending every moment of her spare time with the child she intended to teach to call her "mother."

They were happy days. The joy of them still remained.

Nor, for all the trouble they had caused her, did she regret a single one of them. But her indiscretion grew, and so the blow fell.

It was on a Sunday. In the afternoon. She remembered it well; a glorious sunny day in early summer. She was pushing the baby coach along the sidewalk of the broad country road toward the city. She had paused to readjust the sunshade over the child's head. When she looked up it was to discover a light, top buggy, drawn by a fast trotter, rapidly approaching. Mr. Meakin was driving it, and beside him sat his little, chapel-going wife.

They saw her and promptly pulled up; and instantly Monica knew that trouble was knocking at her door. Mrs. Meakin did not like her. She did not approve of her husband's secretary; and Mrs. Meakin was one of those narrow, straight-laced puritans, who never cease to thank Providence that they are so pure.

"Why, it's Miss Hanson," she promptly exclaimed. "And —oh, the lovely baby. Why——" She looked at Monica's scarlet face and broke off.

Mr. Meakin took up the greeting in the cordial fashion of a man who is well disposed.

"Say, Miss Hanson, it's a hot day for you to be pushing that coach. You surely ought to be around an ice cream parlor with one of your beaus. Not out airing some friend's kid."

But Monica's confusion only increased under the sharp eyes of Mrs. Meakin, which never left her face.

"A baby can't have too much of this beautiful air," she said helplessly.

"Why doesn't its mother look after it?" demanded Mrs. Meakin.

"She's—she's busy."

Monica's attempts at evasion were so feeble, she had so little love for subterfuge, that, to a mind as prone to suspicion as Mrs. Meakin's, the word "mystery" quickly presented itself.

"Whose is it?"

The inevitable question seemed to thunder into the wretched girl's ears.

Whose is it? Whose is it? It was useless to lie to this

woman, whom she knew had no love for her. So on the spur of the moment she did the only thing that seemed possible, seeing Mr. Meakin was her employer. But she did it so badly that, even while she spoke, she knew her doom was sealed.

"She belongs back there." Monica pointed at the distant farm house.

"That house?" cried Mrs. Meakin sharply. "Why, that's Mrs. Gadly's. I——" She turned abruptly to her husband. "We'd better drive on, or we'll be late back for supper, and that will make us late for chapel."

With a flourish of his whip, and a cheery good-bye, Mr. Meakin set his "three-minute" trotter going again, and Monica was left to her dismay.

She knew. She needed no instinct to tell her. It had all been written in Mrs. Meakin's icy face. The woman would find out all about the baby she had seen her husband's secretary with. She would smell out the whole trail with that nose which was ever sharp for an evil scent.

She continued her walk thinking hard all the while, and finally took the child back to its nurse at the usual time.

Mrs. Gadly met her at the front door, and Monica put a sharp question.

"Has Mrs. Meakin been here?"

"She surely has, mam," replied the woman, smiling. "And a God-fearin' woman she is. I've known her years an' years. I didn't jest know you was her good man's secretary. She's a lady, she is; a real, elegant lady. An' she was all took up with the baby, an' the way I'd looked after him. She said as it was a great thing for a woman who 's lost her baby to have the care of another woman's child, kind o' softens the pain. An' when I told her as you paid me so liberal for it—— Why, mam, you ain't faint? Ah, it's the sun; you best come right inside and set down."

It had been a terrible moment for Monica. She knew that her career in San Sabatano had suddenly terminated. The God-fearing Mrs. Meakin would have no mercy on her, particularly as she was her husband's secretary.

She returned to her apartments that evening with her mind made up to a definite course; and, on the Monday morning following, before she went to her office, she looked

up her contract with the *Daily Citizen.* She took it with her. She knew that the thing she was about to do was a tacit admission of the child's parentage. But she intended it so to be, since truthful explanation was denied her.

Mr. Meakin was amiability itself. But there was evident relief in the sigh with which he accepted the return of the girl's contract.

"I'm real sorry, Miss Hanson, real sorry," he said sincerely. "But I guess you're right, seeing things are as they are. You see, Mrs. Mea—you see, San Sabatano has notions. I'd just like to say right here, though, I'm the loser by your going. I'm the loser by a heap. An' whenever you're wanting a reference I'll hand you a bully one. Just you write me when you need it. Meanwhile the cashier'll hand you a check for salary, right away."

Yes, whatever his wife's attitude toward her, Mr. Meakin stood her good friend, for, on her departure, the cashier handed her a check for three months' salary—which she had not earned!

After she left San Sabatano her fortunes, for a while, became more than checkered. Her "ups" were few, and her "downs" were considerably in the ascendant. For a long time her youth prevented her obtaining work in which there was any scope for her abilities and ambitions, consequently the salaries were equally limited in their possibilities. Often she had to accept "free lance" stenography and typing, and not infrequently auxiliary clerk work of a humdrum and narrowing order. But to none of these things would she definitely commit herself, nor would she permit them to shut out the sun of her ambitions. She would keep on working, and watching, and waiting, for that opportunity which she felt was bound to come in the end.

Thus, with each reverse in the stern battle she was fighting, she grew wider in her knowledge of life as it was. Her upbringing had blinded her, and her own simple honesty and faith had further narrowed her focus. But these things were passing, and her view widened as the months lengthened into years.

But her trials were many. Not the least of them was when, as Miss Hanson, it was discovered she was always accompanied by a boy with blue eyes and fair hair, practi-

cally the color of her own. Nor was there any chance of quieting the voice of scandal, when it was known that the particular child always called her "mother."

Twice this occurred in boarding houses of an ultra-respectable tone, which, on the whole, was not so damaging as it was annoying. But when her supposed offence attacked her livelihood, as, on more than one occasion, it very soon did, it was with heartache and grief that Monica realized that a drastic change must be brought about.

She knew that, for his own sake, she must temporarily part with the boy. It was imperative that she earn the money necessary for his education, and, with this scandal attaching to her, that would very soon be made impossible. Furthermore, she realized that he was rapidly growing to years of childish understanding when it would be hopeless, and even dangerous, to attempt to answer the multiplicity of questions regarding his supposed father which flowed from his lips, without giving a damaging impression to his young mind. Later, when he grew up, she would tell him the false story which she had hardened her heart to, and trust to Providence that it might satisfy, and have no evil consequences.

It was a terrible blow to part from him. She loved the boy, whom she had had christened Frank Burton, with all the profound affection of her ardent nature. He was possibly more precious to her than her own son might have been, if only for the fact of the pains she was at to keep him, and the trials which his upbringing brought her.

Then, too, she was never quite without a haunting fear that at any time some unforseen circumstance might arise and snatch him from her care. Besides these things, the boy inherited all his mother's generous nature; all her loyalty; and, in a hundred other ways, reminded her of the sister she had loved. To Monica he was the sweetest creature in the world, and the parting with him came well-nigh to breaking her heart.

But it proved itself for the best. It almost seemed as if Frank's going were in some way responsible for the change of fortune which so quickly followed. Within a month, Monica secured an excellent position in a Chicago wheat broker's office at the biggest salary she had ever earned.

Furthermore, she remained in this place for a year, with unqualified success. Thence she went to another wheat operator's office. Then on, from post to post, always advancing her interests, and always in the wheat world. Truly the boy's going away to school seemed like the first stepping-stone to the successful career she so ardently desired.

So Frank's education was completed in the manner Monica most desired. Her experience in the world of wheat inspired her with definite ideas as to his future; ideas in which, fortunately, he readily concurred.

No one knew better than Monica the fortunes to be won from the soil, and she was at pains to impress on his young mind that such fortunes were far more honestly and easily earned than in the commercial world to which she belonged.

Therefore at the age of fifteen Frank repaired to an agricultural institution to learn in theory that which, later, he was to test in practice.

It was during his career at the agricultural college that Monica first became the secretary of Alexander Hendrie, the greatest wheat grower and operator in the west of Canada. He was a man she had known by reputation for several years, ever since she first stepped within the portals of the wheat world. She had never come into actual contact with him before, but his name was a household word wherever wheat was dealt in. Besides being a big operator on the Winnipeg and Chicago markets, he owned something like thirty square miles of prairie land in Alberta under wheat cultivation, and was notorious for his scrupulous honesty and hard dealing. It was a saying in the world of which he was the uncrowned king that it was always safe to follow where he led, but only to follow. Of course he was a millionaire several times over, but there was no ostentation, no vulgar display with him. He lived a sparing, hard-working life, and in such an employ Monica felt that she had reached the goal of her career.

The manner of her meeting with him was curious, and almost like the work of Fate. But the manner of her engagement as his secretary was still more curious, yet characteristic of the man.

It happened on the railroad. She was returning from the west coast with her then employer, Henry Louth, one of the

most daring of the Chicago wheat men. Perhaps a better description of him would have been "reckless," but the newspapers reported him as daring—until after his death.

Like many another speculator in the past, this man had become disastrously involved in a wild endeavor to corner wheat. But he found, as others had found before him, instead of completing the corner he hoped to make, he had only created a Frankenstein which threatened him with destruction. So far did he suddenly find himself involved that only financial assistance on an enormous scale could have saved him from ruin. His thoughts turned at once to Alexander Hendrie, who was then in Vancouver. He was the only man who could afford him adequate help. There was nothing for it but a desperate rush across the continent on his forlorn hope, and he undertook the journey at once, accompanied by Monica.

But like the majority of forlorn hopes inspired by ill fortune, the journey ended in dire disaster. When Louth put his proposition to the millionaire he learned to his horror that this man was actually the head of the syndicate who had been his undoing. It was an absurd blending of comedy and tragedy, yet the situation was wholly characteristic of the methods of Alexander Hendrie. The work had been carried out with all the subtlety of the astute mind which had lifted the man to his present position. It had been carried out by secret agents, and never for one moment had his name been allowed to figure in the affair. But it was Hendrie who was responsible for the shattering of the edifice of monopoly Louth had so recklessly attempted to set up; and the latter set out on his return journey a broken and beaten man.

Monica would never forget that journey, and all it meant to her. While the train was held up by a heavy snowfall at a place called Glacier, in the Rocky Mountains, Henry Louth, in his private car, took the opportunity of shooting himself. The sensation, the hubbub, the excitement the affair caused was intense; and Monica attended him during his dying moments, afterwards watching at his bedside until his body was removed by the authorities.

It was during this latter period, when the excitement had died down, and all was quiet again, that a large man

entered the car from another part of the train. He came straight to the bedside and looked gravely at the dead man. Then he turned to the beautiful woman beside the bed, and looked at her with unsmiling eyes.

She knew him at once, and returned his look unflinchingly. It was Alexander Hendrie. She recognized the strong, rugged face of the man, and his abundant fair hair.

In a moment a cold resentment at the intrusion rose up in her, and, for the life of her, she could not restrain the impulse to give it expression.

"Well?" she inquired. "Are you satisfied?"

"How?"

The man displayed no emotion. His ejaculation was the expression of a mind preoccupied.

"You—you are responsible for this."

Monica's challenge came with biting coldness. But Hendrie only shook his head.

"Wrong. Guess you don't understand. Maybe most folks—who don't understand—will say that. But I'm not responsible for—that." He indicated the dead man with a contemptuous nod. "I was on a legitimate proposition to prevent the consumers of wheat being plundered. I'm losing money by what I've done. Guess he hadn't the grit to stand the racket of his dirty game. Men like him are well out of it."

Monica dropped her eyes from the steady gaze of the iron man before her. Somehow she felt ashamed of her impulsive accusation. In his concise fashion he had given her a new understanding of what had happened.

"I hadn't seen it that way before," she said, almost humbly.

Hendrie nodded.

"You were his secretary," he said, with a subtle emphasis.

"Yes."

Again the man nodded.

"I've heard of you."

Then he turned as if about to go. But he did not go. He paused, and again his steady eyes sought hers.

"Guess he's dead. I need another secretary. You can have the job."

This was Monica's first encounter with a personality which had a strange and powerful attraction for her.

Two weeks later she found herself in her new position, established in the millionaire's palatial offices in Winnipeg at, what was for her, a princely salary.

At the end of nearly two years she was still with him, a privileged, confidential secretary; and at last the woman in her was crying out against the head which had for so long governed her affairs. The woman in her had been too strenuously subjected in her eighteen years of a commercial career. She had shut her ears to every cry of rebellion for the sake of her quixotic pledge. But now they were too loud, too strong to be any longer ignored, and their incessant pleading found an almost ready ear.

Alexander Hendrie had offered her marriage. He had done more. This apparently cold commercial machine had shown her a side of his nature which the eye of his world was never permitted to witness. He had thrown open the furnace doors of his masterful soul, and she had witnessed such a fire of passionate love that left her dazed and powerless before its fierce intensity.

And she—she had needed little urging. The wonderful attraction of this personality had ripened during her two years of service. She no longer worked with every faculty straining for the handsome salary he gave her; she worked for the man. Her whole heart was wrapped up in his achievement. Yes, she knew that he stood before even her love for the boy whom she had taught to call her "mother."

That was her trouble now. That was the one all-pervading drop of gall in her cup of happiness. Dr. Strong had warned her, and now she was torn by the hardness of her lot as she gazed upon the frowning crags which loomed up on her horizon.

She rose and crossed the room to her bureau. She picked a letter up that was lying on the top of it. It was the last letter she had received from young Frank, from the farm he was on, not far from Calford, just outside the little township of Gleber. She read it through again. One paragraph particularly held her attention and she read it a second time.

"I've met such a bully girl. Her name's Phyllis Raysun. She's just about my own age. It was at a dance, at a farm twenty miles away. We danced ten dances together. Oh,

mother, you will like her. She's fine. Pretty as anything, with dark eyes and dark hair——"

Monica went back to her seat at the window. There was a smile in her eyes, but there was trouble in them, too. She understood that Frank was grown up. He was grown up, and like all the rest of young people his thoughts were turning toward girls and matrimony.

Frank was still in ignorance of the facts of his birth. She, Monica, was his "mother," so far as he knew, and he understood that his father was dead. This was the belief she had brought him up to. This was the belief she hoped to keep him in. But now, all too late, she was realizing through such letters as these that a time must soon come when he would want to know more; when the preliminary lies her sister had forced her into must be augmented by a whole tissue of falsehood to keep the secret of his mother's shame from him.

Her determination to shield her sister was still her principal thought.

At all costs her promise to the dying woman must be kept. There should be no weakening. She would carefully prepare her story. Lies—it would all be lies. But she could not help it. She felt they were lies for which there was a certain justification, lies which possessed no base object, but rather the reverse.

But now had come this fresh complication in the person of Alexander Hendrie. Here was something she had never even dreamed of. He became something more than a complication. He was a threat. She could not marry him. She must definitely refuse him. And then——

Despair took hold of her and wrung her heart. Marriage she knew was forever denied her. She had known it while she dressed herself and prepared to receive the man she loved that afternoon. She had known it even while she rejoiced in her own attractiveness, and the thoughts of the love she had inspired.

She turned to the window with a deep sigh and stared hopelessly out of it at the keen winter sunshine.

To contemplate marriage with a man as passionately in love as Alexander Hendrie, a man as strong, as masterful as he, with the existence of her boy to be explained away, would

be rank madness. It was hopeless, impossible. It could not be.

No, she knew. She needed no prompting. Her course lay clear before her. She dared not sacrifice the hard struggles of those eighteen years for this love which had at last come into her life. She knew now how she had sacrificed herself on the altar of affection when she pledged herself to the care of her sister's child. That sacrifice must go on to the end, come what might. It was hard, hard, but she resolutely faced the destiny which she had marked out for herself.

That was why she had not telephoned to her employer to put him off. That was why she had specially prepared her toilet to receive him. She would definitely refuse to marry him. But she would rather lacerate her already wounded heart by the painful delight of an interview, than shut out of her life this one passionate memory under the cold seal of an envelope.

It was her woman's way, but it was none the less sincere, none the less strong.

CHAPTER II

ALEXANDER HENDRIE

Had Monica only known it her weakness lay in the very strength of that loyalty which held her to her promise to her dead sister. She was far too honest to deal successfully in affairs which demanded the smallest shadow of subterfuge. At the best she could only hope to lie blunderingly, and to blunder in falsehood leads to sure disaster.

So she had no real understanding of that which lay before her, the endless troubles she was preparing for herself and those belonging to her. The pity of it. One could almost imagine the Angel of Truth wringing his hands, and weeping for the mistaken honesty which clung to a quixotic promise given eighteen years ago to a dying woman.

It was a nervous, troubled woman who started at the clang of the bell at her outer door. She turned with terrified eyes to the silver clock which stood on her bureau. It was four o'clock. Four o'clock to the minute; and instinctively

her hands went up to her hair, and nimble fingers lightly patted it.

For a moment she stood irresolutely staring before her. She seemed in desperate doubt, as though laboring under desire to greet her visitor, while instinctively fearing the outcome of his visit. The next moment her silken skirts rustled as she hurriedly passed out to her front door.

Alexander Hendrie followed her into the sitting-room, and promptly its femininity gave way to the atmosphere which his personality seemed to shed upon all that encountered it.

It was not an essentially refined personality, it was too rugged, too grimly natural, too suggestive of Nature in her harsher moments to possess any of the softer refinements of life. A bald, broken crag set in the midst of a flower garden of perfect order would rob its surroundings of its delicate charm and trifling beauties. So it was with the man, Hendrie, in the essentially feminine room which was Monica's care. He dwarfed the refinements of it with a magnetic claim for his own rugged picturesqueness.

He was a man of something over six feet in height. There was not an ounce of superfluous flesh upon his muscular, erect form, which was clad in the simple fashion of a well-tailored man who takes but little interest in his clothes. But these things were almost lost sight of in the absorbing interest of his rather plain face.

An artist painting the picture of a Viking of old would have reveled in such a face, and such a wealth of waving fair hair. He would have caught the look of confidence, the atmosphere of victory which lay in every detail of the strong mold in which his features were cast.

It was a face full of faults, yet it was such a combination of strength and mentality that no eye trained to the study of physiognomy could have resisted it. The lines in it were pronounced. Yet every line was a definite indication of the power behind it. There was a contemplative light shining in the keen gray eyes which told of perfect control of all emotions; there was a definite indentation between the fair, ample brows, which suggested a power of concentration. The nose was broad and pronounced, with curiously sensitive nostrils. The cheekbones were lean and broad. The mouth

was broad, too, but firmly closed, and quite free from the least suggestion of animal sensuality. Yet it was a hard face; not hard in the sense of cruelty, it was hard in its definite, almost relentless purpose.

Monica realized something of all this as she brought a large rocker forward for his use; and her heart failed her as she remembered the mission that had brought him to her apartment.

"You're pretty comfortable here, Monica," he said, glancing round with a faintly approving smile, as he dropped into the rocker.

The woman followed his glance with a responsive smile.

"Thanks to you," she said readily, without noting one detail of the tastefully arranged furnishings which had brought forth his comment.

The man's brows went up in swift inquiry.

"How?"

Monica sat down. She was glad of the support, but her manner was perfectly easy.

"The generous salary you pay me—of course."

Hendrie shook his head.

"I never pay generous salaries. Those who receive my salaries earn them."

Monica laughed. Slowly confidence was returning.

"That's so like you," she said. "I wonder if I earn $5000 a year. I have often worked twice as hard for half the sum."

"Quite so. But what was the work? From my point of view you earn the money, and perhaps more, by carrying the confidence I always know I can place in you. But, say, don't let's discuss the economy of commerce. Guess I came here on a different errand."

Monica averted her gaze. She looked out of the window she was facing.

"Yes," she said, with a sudden return of all her old apprehensions.

The man leaned forward in his chair. His hands were clasped together, and his forearms pressed heavily on his knees. There was a faint flush on his cheeks, and the usual contemplative light had passed from his eyes, leaving them alight with a growing fire of passion.

"Tell me," he cried suddenly, a deep note in his voice.

"Have you anything to say to me? Anything about our talk the other night?"

Monica kept her eyes averted. She was summoning all her courage, that she might the more successfully bruise and beat down her own love for this man.

She shook her head without daring to face him. She knew, she felt the heat of passion shining in his gray eyes.

"It—it—can't be," she said, stumbling fatally.

She waited, hardly knowing what to expect. As the man remained silent the beatings of her heart seemed to have suddenly become so loud that she thought he must surely hear them; and hearing them, would understand the cowardice she was laboring under.

Had she dared to look at him she must have seen the marked change her refusal had brought about. The same passionate fire was in his eyes, there was the same flush upon his cheeks. But there was an added something that was quite different from these things, something which she might have recognized, for she had witnessed it many times before in her intercourse with him. It was the fighting spirit of the man slowly rising, the light of battle gathering.

He smiled, and his smile was strangely tender in a man of his known character.

"Is that all?" he asked at last. "Is that your—final word?"

"Yes," she almost gasped, and desperately faced him.

Then she abruptly rose from her seat and moved toward the window. She had seen more in his eyes than she could face, and still remain true to her decision.

"But's—it's insufficient, Mon."

The man rose from his chair and followed her. He came near, and stood close behind her. She could feel his warm breath on the soft flesh which was left bare by the low neck of her costume. She trembled, and stood helplessly dreading lest he should recognize the trembling. Then she heard his low voice speaking, and her whole soul responded to the fire that lay behind his words.

"I love you, Mon. I love you so that I cannot, will not give you up. I love you so that all else in my life goes for nothing. All my life I've reveled in the constant joy of

anticipation of the success I have achieved. All my life I have centered my whole soul on these things, and trained brain and body for a titanic struggle to the top of the financial ladder. And now, what is it, if—if I can't win you, too? Mon, it's simply nothing. Can't you understand what I feel when I say that? More than all the wealth and position I've dreamed of all my life I want you—you. What is it? Why? Tell me why it—can't be."

But Monica could not tell him. She knew she could not; and she knew that she could not go on listening to the strong man's pleadings without yielding.

Suddenly, in something like desperation, she turned and faced him.

"I tried to make it plain to you the other night," she cried, with a complaint that made her voice almost harsh. "I tried to tell you then that I could not marry you. But you wouldn't listen to me. You laughed my refusal aside. You told me you would not give me up. I can only reiterate what I tried to tell you then. Why—why urge me when I say I—I cannot marry you?"

"Cannot?"

"Yes—cannot, cannot!"

In desperation Monica added emphasis to her negative.

"There can only be one reason for 'cannot,'" said Hendrie, with an abrupt return to calmness. "Are you married? Have you a husband living?"

The woman's denial flashed out without thought.

"I am not married. I never have been married."

In a moment she realized the danger of so precipitate a denial. The man's face lit more ardently than ever, and he drew closer.

"Then you must take that word back, and say you—'will not.' But you can't say that," he smiled gently. "Why should you? Yes, I know you don't dislike me. You've always seen me as I am. I'm no different. Say, Mon, I'm not here to bully you into marrying me. I'm here to plead with you. I who have never in my life pleaded to man or woman. I want you to give me that which I know no money can ever buy, no position can ever claim. I want your love. I want it because I love you, and without you nothing is worth while."

He was very near her now. He was so near that Monica dared not move. She could only stand helplessly gazing out of the window. As she remained silent he urged her again, placing one powerful hand gently upon her shoulder.

"Tell me, do you dislike the hard, unscrupulous financier that men are only too ready to villify?" he asked, with a gentle smile of confidence. "Do you?" His hand moved till it dropped to the woman's soft, rounded upper arm.

"Mon," he continued, "I want you so much. Tell me you don't—dislike me."

Monica's courage was swiftly ebbing. The task she had set herself was too hard for her. She was too simply human to withstand the approach of this great love. The touch of the man's hand, so gentle, so almost reverent, had sent the blood coursing through her veins in a hot, passionate tide. All her love for him surged uppermost, and drove her headlong to a reckless denial.

"No," she cried, in a low voice. "How could I dislike you? What does it matter to me what men say of you? You have been the essence of goodness to me—oh!"

The exclamation came without fear, without resentment. It was the suddenness of it all. In a moment she lay crushed in the man's powerful arms; his tall figure towered over her, and his plain face looked ardently down into hers while he poured out a passionate torrent of words into her willing ears.

"Then I'll take no refusal," he cried, with a ring of triumph and joy in his deep voice. "Look up, Mon, look up, my dear, and tell me that you don't love me. Look up, and tell me with your eyes looking right into mine, and I'll believe you, and let you go. Look up, my darling, and tell me. You can't—you can't. Say—it's useless to try. Quit it, Mon, quit it. You love me, I know. I feel it here, right here in my heart, here, Mon, here," he cried triumphantly. "Right where your beautiful head is resting."

He moved one hand from about her, and deliberately lifted her face so that he could gaze down upon the eyes hidden beneath the deeply fringed lids.

"Come, Mon," he cried tenderly. "Speak up. Say, I can't just hear you. I want to hear you say you don't love me, you hate me for this. No? Then you must kiss me."

He bent his head, and drew her face up to his. And an exquisite joy flooded Monica's heart as he rained burning kisses upon her lips, her eyes, her hair.

So they remained for many minutes. He, speaking words which were ample caresses, she, listening like one in a wonderful, heavenly dream.

But at last she stirred in his arms, and finally released herself. Then, with flushed face and bowed head, she flung herself upon the ottoman beside her with something almost like a sob.

Hendrie waited for a moment. Then he drew up a chair and sat down, and deliberately removed the hands in which her face was buried.

"What is it, Mon?" he inquired anxiously, but in his firm, decided way.

"I—I don't know," she cried, with the desperate helplessness of a child. "You—you've made me love you, and—and it's all wrong—all wrong."

Hendrie smiled confidently.

"Is it? Ah, well, you do love me. That's all that matters —really."

She stared at him with suddenly widening eyes. Then she, too, smiled a tender, shy smile that still was full of trouble.

"I'm afraid—I do," she said. "But I didn't mean you to know——"

"Afraid?"

Hendrie's smile was good to see. But it passed quickly, and he went on in the manner of a man always accustomed to dictate.

"Now listen, Mon. We are going to be married without unnecessary delay. How soon can you be ready?"

In a moment Monica realized the utter folly of what she had done. In a moment it swept over her, threatening and almost paralyzing her faculties. She paled. Then a deep flush leaped into her cheek, and, in a fever of apprehension, she pleaded for a respite.

"No, no, not yet," she cried, with a sudden energy which quite startled her lover. "I cannot marry you until—until —— You see," she blundered on, "there are so many things. I—I have responsibilities. There are——"

Hendrie mercifully broke in upon her, and perhaps saved her from betraying in her hysterical apprehension those very things she wished to keep from him.

"Don't be scared, Mon," he said quickly. "It's for you to say. It's right up to you. I shan't rush you. See. Think it over. I've got to go west to-morrow. Guess I'll be away a week. Say, this day week. You'll get it all fixed by then. I'll get right back and you can tell me when you'll marry me. You see, I just want you—whenever you're ready."

It was impossible to withstand him, and, in desperation, Monica realized that it was worse than useless to pit her reason against a love she desired more than all the world. She felt utterly helpless, like one swept off her feet by an irresistible tide. There was a recklessness, too, in her blood now, a recklessness flowing hotly through veins which for so long had been left unstirred in their perfect calm, and somehow the joy of it had intoxicated her reason and left her unable to adequately control it.

Later it would be different. When he had gone she would be able to think soberly, and she knew she would have to think hard to repair the damage of these moments. She would wait till then when the toll was demanded of her, and now—now? These moments were too sweetly precious to deny. She would not, she could not deny them. So, while she knew that every fraction of the penalty would be demanded of her later, she thanked her God for this love that had come to her, and abandoned herself to its delight.

CHAPTER III

THE PENALTY

It was a changed woman who restlessly paced the narrow limits of her sitting-room four days later. Monica was awaiting another visitor; again she was awaiting the ominous clang of the bell at the front door. But her feelings were very different now. The timid shrinking, the mere thrill of troubled apprehension with which she had awaited the coming of the man who had changed all those things into a wild, reckless joy, was nothing to the desperation with which she contemplated the coming visit. She knew that the penalty

was about to be exacted, the toll, for the stolen moments when she had permitted the woman in her to taste of the sweets which surely she had a right to.

The sober moments she had anticipated had come; oh, yes, they had come as she knew they inevitably must come. She had faced the consequences of the weakness she believed herself to have displayed in all their nakedness, and she saw before her such a tangle, the contemplation of which had set her head whirling, and filled her heart with despair.

She was torn between her loyalty to the living, and her duty to the dead. She was torn between that which she knew she owed to herself, and all those other obligations which could be summed up as part of the strong moral side of her nature. She was seeking a central path which might satisfy in some degree each of the opposing claims. She was committing that fatal mistake of seeking the easiest road, with the full knowledge that it was a mistake. She had tasted life, and now she was powerless to continue the sacrifice she had for such long years marked out for herself.

The habit of years was strong upon her. There was something almost superstitious in the way she clung to the promise she had so rashly given her sister. She could no more outrage that than she could deny the love that had come to her so late. Therefore she saw nothing but that perilous middle course open before her.

She had sent for her boy, the man—yes, he was a man now—whom she had been at such pains to bring up with lofty aspirations, and a fine sense of love, and honor, and duty. She told herself she was going to lie to him, lie to him with all the heartless selfishness of an utterly weak and worthless woman. She tried to smother her conscience by reminding herself that she had always seen the necessity of ultimately lying to him, and now only the motive of the lies was changed. She told herself these things, but she did not convince herself. She knew that originally her contemplated lies were that he might be kept from the knowing of his mother's shame, and as such might even have found justification in the eyes of the Recording Angel. Now it was different; their motive was purely one of self, and for such there could be no justification.

So she was desperate. All that was best in her was war-

ring with the baser human side of a really fine nature. She suffered agonies of torture while she waited for the coming of the man who would gaze at her with wide, frank, trusting eyes, while she lied something of his simple faith and youthful happiness away.

Was there wonder that she dreaded his coming? Could it be otherwise? She could see no other course than the one she had decided upon. She was blinded by her newly found love for the man, Hendrie; she was blinded by her promise to a dead woman. Frank must be persuaded into the background. He must remain hidden, lest the breath of scandal reach Hendrie, and she be robbed of the happiness she so yearned for. He must be made the sacrifice for her selfish desires.

In the midst of her desperate thought, the signal rang out through the apartments. Oh, that bell; how she hated its brazen note. But now that the moment of her trial had come there was no shrinking, no hesitation. She passed swiftly to the door and opened it, and, in a moment, was engulfed in a bear-like embrace by a great, fair-haired young giant who, tall as Monica was, quite towered over her.

"Why, mother," he cried, as he finally released her, "I never had such a rush to get here so soon. Guess your wire set me on the dead jump. I drove twenty-five miles to the depot in under three hours, to catch the east-bound mail, and nearly foundered old Bernard's best team. But I'd made up my mind to——"

Monica's eyes shone with admiration and love.

"That's so like you, Frank, dear," she cried. "Come right in and sit down. You're such an impulsive boy. But I'm glad you've come—so glad."

The delight at the sight of her beloved boy had almost died out of Monica's eyes as she finished speaking. It had all come back to her—the meaning of his visit.

Frank flung himself into the same rocking chair in which Alexander Hendrie had sat, and gazed up at the beautiful woman he called "mother" with a radiant smile on his handsome, ingenuous face.

"Gee, I'm tired," he exclaimed. "Two nights and a day in the train. I didn't come sleeper. I didn't want to rush

you too much. So I just dozed in the ordinary car where I sat."

In spite of everything Monica's delight in this fatherless boy was wonderful. All her love was shining in her eyes again as she exclaimed—

"Oh, Frank! You didn't come sleeper? Why not? You shouldn't have considered the expense."

The boy laughed joyously.

"That's so like you, Mon, dear," he promptly retorted. He always called her "Mon" in his playful moods, declaring that she was far too young and pretty to be called "mother." "You really are an extravagant woman to have a growing and expensive family."

"Growing?" Monica laughed happily. "I hope not. Goodness! You always find it more convenient to sit down when you're talking to me."

The boy nodded.

"That's because I'm tired—and hungry," he said lightly. "You see I haven't eaten since breakfast. Got any lunch?"

"Lunch? Of course. Oh, Frank, really you're not to be trusted looking after yourself. Of course I've a lunch ready for you. It's just cold. I don't trust the janitor's cooking except for breakfast."

"Bully! I know your lunches. Come along."

The boy sprang from his seat, and, seizing Monica about the waist, was for rushing her off to the dining-room.

Monica abandoned herself to the delights of the moment. The boy could not have been more to her if he had really been her son. Her eyes were full of a maternal adoration. He was so tall, she thought; and his bright, shrewd, good-natured blue eyes full of half-smiling seriousness. Was there ever such a face on a boy? How handsome he was with his finely cut, regular features, his abundant fair hair, which, since he had been on the farm, had been allowed to run riot. And then his hugely muscular body. Eighteen! Only eighteen! Little wonder, she thought, this Phyllis Raysun was ready to dance so often with him.

"You're much too boisterous," she chided him, smiling happily.

"Never mind. Mon," he cried, "take me to the ban—— Oh, I forgot. Your wire was 'rushed.' You wanted to see

me at once. That's why I nearly killed Bernard's team. There's—there's nothing wrong, is there?"

The blue eyes were serious enough now. He had come to a standstill, with his arms still about Monica's waist, half way across the room.

But now it was Monica's turn to urge. All the joy had gone out of her eyes. He had reminded her of the tissue of falsehood she had prepared for him. No, no, she could not tell him yet, and, with all a coward's procrastination, she put him off.

"I'll—I'll tell you about it when you've eaten," she said hastily. "We've—we've got to have a serious talk. But not—now. Afterwards."

Frank gave her a quick, sidelong glance.

"Righto," he said simply. But a shadow had somehow crept into his eyes. So deep was the sympathy between these two that he promptly read something of the trouble underlying her manner.

Frank was seated on the lounge beside the window. His attitude was one of tense, hard feeling. His blue eyes were full of bitterness as they stared out at the coppery sheen of the telegraph wires, which caught the winter sunlight, just outside the sitting-room window.

Monica had just finished speaking. For some minutes the low pleading of her voice had reached him across the room. She was as far from him as the limits of the room would permit. Such was her repulsion at the lies she had to tell him that she felt the distance between them could not be too wide.

Her story was told. She had branded herself with her sister's shame. The curious twist of her mind held her to her promise, even to this extent. Now she waited with bowed head for the judgment of this youth of eighteen who had been taught to call her "mother." And as she sat there waiting she felt that her whole life, her whole being was made up of degraded falsehood.

The story was as complete as she could make it. The work was done. Her sister's name, and ill-fame, had been kept from her son.

As the moments passed and no word came in answer,

Monica's apprehension grew, and she urged him. She could face his utmost scorn better than this suspense.

"That is all, Frank," she said, with a dignity she was wholly unaware of.

The man stirred. He stretched out his great limbs upon the couch and drew them up again. Then he turned his eyes upon the waiting woman. They were unsmiling, but they had no condemnation in them. He had fought out his little battle with himself.

"So I am a—bastard," he said, slowly and distinctly.

"Frank; oh, Frank! Not that word."

The boy laughed, but without any mirth.

"Why not? Why be afraid of the truth? Besides, I have always known—at least suspected it."

Monica suddenly buried her face in her hands. He had known. He had suspected. And all these years she had endeavored to keep the secret from him. The thought of it all hurt her as much as if the shame of it were really hers.

Presently he left his seat and came to her side.

"Don't worry, mother, dear," he said, with one hand tenderly laid upon her shoulder. "You see, we never talked much of my father. You were never easy when you spoke of him. I guessed there was something wrong; and being young, and perhaps imaginative, I found the truth without much guessing. Still I didn't ask questions. It was not up to me to hurt you. What was the use. I knew I should hear some day, and quite made up my mind how to act." He smiled. "You see, if you told me I knew I could bear it almost—easily. I should have far less to bear than you who told it, and—and that showed me how small a thing it was for me—by comparison. If it came through other sources I should have acted differently, particularly if the telling of it came from—a man."

He paused, and Monica looked up at him with wondering admiration.

"I want to tell you, mother," he hurried on, blushing painfully with self-consciousness, "that only a great and brave woman could have told her son—what you have told me. And—and I honor you for it. I want to tell you it's not going to make any difference between us, unless it is to increase my—my love. As for me—I don't see that it's

going to give me sleepless nights, so—so just let's forget it."

Frank's manner became hurried and ashamed as he finished up. It seemed absurd to him that he should be saying such things to his mother. Yet he wanted to say them. He intended to say them. So he blundered as quickly and shamefacedly through them as he could.

To his enormous relief Monica sighed as though the worst were over. But her sigh was at the wonderful magnanimity of this huge boy. He started to return to the lounge. Half way across the room he came to a sudden stop, and a look of perplexity drew his brows together. In his anxiety for his mother he had forgotten. Now he remembered. Suddenly he turned back.

"You didn't send for me so urgently to tell me this?" he demanded. "This would have kept."

Monica shook her head decidedly. She caught a sharp breath.

"It would not have kept. It—it had to be told—now."

"Now?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because I am going to be—married."

"Mother!"

There was no doubt about the man's dismay. He stood there hardly daring to believe his senses. His mother was going to be married after—after——

"But, mother, you don't mean that? You're not serious," he cried, his ingenious face flushed, his whole look incredulous.

Something of the woman's resentment against the unworthy part that had been forced upon her suddenly found expression.

"Yes, I mean it," she cried sharply. "Of course I mean it. I am in no mood to trifle. Why else should I have sent for you now to tell you the miserable story you have just listened to, unless it were that my coming marriage made it imperative?"

The flush deepened upon the man's face.

"But you can't," he cried, with sudden vehemence. "You daren't! Oh, mother, you must be mad to think of marriage

now—I mean with—with my existence to be accounted for."

"That's just why I have sent for you."

Monica sprang from her seat and ran to him. She reached up, and placed both hands upon his shoulders and gazed pleadingly into his face.

"Don't fail me, Frank. Don't fail me," she cried, all her woman's heart stirred to a dreadful fear lest, after all, she should lose the happiness she was striving for, had lied for, was ready to do almost anything for. "You don't know what it means to me. How can you? You are only a boy. It means everything. Yes, it means my life. Oh, Frank, think of all the years I have gone through without a home, without any of those things which a woman has a right to, except what I have earned for myself with my own two hands. Think of the loveless life I have been forced to live for all these years. Frank, Frank, I have given up everything in the world for you, and now—now I love this man—I love him with my whole soul."

Her head was bowed, and the agitated boy led her back to her seat. He was beginning to understand things. His honest eyes were beginning to look life in the face, and to see there phases quite undreamed of in his youthful mind.

"I think I am beginning to understand, mother," he said simply. "Tell me more. Tell me what you want of me. I—you see, all this is a bit of a shock. I don't seem to know where I am. Who is the man?"

"Alexander Hendrie."

"Hendrie? The man you work for? The man who owns all those miles of wheat up our way? The millionaire?"

Frank's eyes shone with a sudden enthusiasm as he detailed the achievements of the wheat king. For the moment he had forgotten the reason of the mention of his name.

"Yes, yes." Something of his enthusiasm found an echo in Monica. "Isn't it wonderful? Isn't it wonderful? Can you wonder that I love him? Such a king among men. All my life I have longed for achievement in the commercial world. To me it is all that is worth while. This man has it. He is it. I have been his chief secretary for two years. I have had a most intimate knowledge of all his affairs, of the man. I have helped in my little way toward his success. I love this man, and he loves me. He will not hear of my refusing him.

I intended to because of you, but—but he is too strong for me. He has bent my will to his, and I—I have yielded. Nor was it all unwillingly. Oh, no. I was ready enough to yield in spite of——"

"Does—he know of my existence?" Frank demanded. His eyes were bright with alertness.

Monica's eyes widened.

"Of course not! If he knew of you my poor dream would be shattered for ever. That is the terrible part. That is why—why I have had to tell you everything."

"I see."

The man flung himself on the couch and clasped his hands behind his head. He was thinking hard. Bit by bit all that was in his mother's mind was coming to him. He let her go on talking while he readjusted his new focus.

"Listen to me. Let us look at this thing from your point of view. You know all we have striven for in setting you up in life. We have been scraping and saving that you should be properly equipped. Now we are saving to buy you an adequate farm. You have got to do big things with that farm. You must go further than merely making a living, and marry, and bring up a large family. You must rise. You must become a wheat king, too. If I marry Alexander think of what it will mean to you. I shall be able to do these things for you almost at once. You shall start on the best farm money can buy. There will be no stinting. You can have everything. And you will rise as I want you to; as you want to. You, too, will become a power in the wonderful, wonderful field of commerce. Oh, when I think of it it makes me desperate at the thought of losing it all."

Frank remained lost in thought for some moments longer. Then he suddenly looked up as though he had come to a final decision.

"Look here, mother. I suppose I haven't had experience enough to grasp the moral side of this thing. I—I suppose there is a moral side to it," he said, with something almost like helplessness. "But it seems to me that—that Hendrie's eyes must never light on me, as—as any relation of yours. Is that it? You want me to know just how the position stands, and then hustle into the background, into my hole, like—like any gopher."

Monica sighed. The ready understanding of the boy was saving her worlds of painful explanation.

"I'm afraid that's what it comes to, Frank, though it sounds dreadful put that way. It sounds as if we were conspirators scheming to get the better of Alexander. Yes, it sounds awful. And yet——"

Frank gave the first sign of impatience.

"Does it matter what it sounds like? I don't think so," he said sharply. "You love this man, mother, and you want to marry him. Very well, marry him. I will never jeopardize your happiness. It is small enough return for all the sacrifices you have made for me. I promise you Hendrie shall never know you are my mother. I promise you never to come near——"

"No, no, Frank. I don't want that," Monica cried desperately. "I could not bear that. I must see you sometimes, and later, when—when things have settled down——"

Frank shook his head.

"You are taking a grave risk, mother," he said earnestly. "Far better let me pass out of your life—altogether."

"No, no! I would rather never marry than that. Promise me that you will come and see me, and I will see you whenever opportunity offers. Promise me, or——"

"All right, mother," replied the man, with his gentle, affectionate smile. "You go ahead. You can always rely on me for anything. And I give you my word of honor your husband shall never know that I am your son."

That night Frank Burton leaned back in the upholstered seat of the ordinary car on the west-bound train. He made no attempt to read the *Winnipeg Free Press* which lay open on his lap. He was busy forming conclusions. One of them was that life was by no means the simple affair it had seemed to him two days ago.

But he came to a more important conclusion than that. He tried to view things from his mother's standpoint, from the point of view of her feelings, and, while he deplored the gravity of the risk she, as a woman, was taking, he acknowledged that he would have done the same himself.

He thought of Phyllis Raysun—his Phyllis—and went hot and cold as he tried to picture what his life would be if he

were never to see her again. He knew, in the recklessness of his youthful courage, he would take any risk rather than lose her.

Yes, love was a great and wonderful thing. He had just made the discovery. His interview with his mother had opened his eyes to the state of his own feelings. Love? Why it was more than worth any risk. To him, in the first flush of his eighteen years, it was the very essence of life. It was all that really mattered. And he almost laughed when he thought of the shock he had experienced when he had been deliberately told he was a—bastard.

CHAPTER IV

THE BLINDING FIRES

Hendrie stood with one foot on the burnished rail of the anthracite stove which augmented the heating apparatus of Monica's sitting-room. He was smoking a cigarette in the pensive manner of a perfectly contented man. His eyes idly wandered over the simple but dainty furnishing of the room, while his mind, that wonderful mechanism with which he had carved his way to a mighty fortune, was busy dreaming dreams of the future, which, for once, contained no thoughts associated with the amassing of his immense wealth.

He was contemplating rather the spending of money than the making of it. He was thinking pleasantly of those contracts which he had already given out for the colossal alterations which were being made in the mansion he owned out West, upon his wheat lands. He was thinking of the palatial residence which he had just purchased here, in Winnipeg, and of the wonderful decorations that he had already arranged should be executed by the finest decorators in New York.

He intended that nothing should lack for the delight and luxury of his bride. His whole being was permeated with a passion such as he had never believed himself capable of. And, for the moment, he was tasting the ripe delights of a wonderfully successful career. He loved more madly than any youthful lover; he loved for the first time in his strenuous life, and the exquisite joy of being able to

give out of his overflowing storehouses intoxicated him.

He was a fine-looking figure as he stood there in his perfectly fitting evening clothes. His spare frame suited the refreshing smartness of such a costume, which softened the harsher lines of his build, and even seemed to add to the fascination of his rugged features.

He was awaiting Monica's pleasure while she arrayed herself in the adjoining room. Nor did he display the least impatience. He was rather enjoying the delay than otherwise. It afforded him those moments of delightful anticipation which rarely enough find their equal in realization. He watched her beautiful personality moving through luxuriously conceived pictures of their future life together. He saw her the head of his princely establishments, the woman of gracious presence and perfect form, a dazzling jewel in the crown of social success he intended eventually to wear. Nor were these dreams the outcome of mere selfish vanity. It pleased him to think that she was to become that perfect pivot upon which his life should revolve. He knew she was a good woman, a phrase he used only in the loftiest sense. He felt that to serve her, to minister to her happiness, was a wonderful delight and privilege, and that, in living for it, he had not lived in vain.

No, he was not impatient. There was no reason for impatience, even in face of that truly feminine delay to which Monica was treating him. He had come for the verdict she had promised him, and he knew that it was to be favorable to his desires. So he had made his arrangements with the decision of a man who is unaccustomed to denial. They would dine out together, and afterward spend the evening at the theater.

He threw his cigarette end into the stove. He was about to light a fresh one when a sound caught his ear. He suddenly dashed the unlighted cigarette after the other, and stood erect, waiting. Yes, the soft rustle of skirts moving toward the dividing doors was unmistakable. Monica had completed her toilet, and was coming to him.

A frank delight shone in his steady eyes as they turned to the folding doors. His lips were parted in a smile. Such was the ecstasy of his feelings that it seemed as if the whole earth, the whole universe were acclaiming his happiness.

Her hand was upon the door handle. He strode hastily to her assistance, and flung the doors wide. Nor was his action one of mere conventional politeness. It was the impulse of one who felt that the future could hold no happier service than the care of this woman's well-being.

Monica was in full evening dress, an exquisite picture of perfect womanhood. From the crown of her beautiful head, with its wonderful halo of soft, waving fair hair, to the soles of her satin slippers there was not a detail in her figure or gown that could offend. In Hendrie's eyes there was nothing on earth comparable with her.

Her eyes shone with suppressed excitement, and her usually delicately tinted cheeks were a trifle pale. Her bosom, so deliciously rounded, rose and fell a shade more rapidly than usual with the emotions of the moment, but these were the only outward signs she gave of the great love stirring her woman's heart.

Hendrie stepped forward.

"Mon!"

In a moment she lay panting in his arms, and his kisses melted the pallor of her cheek.

"Mine! Mine!" he cried, with a deep note of emotion in his voice. "Mine for ever!" he went on, his powerful arms crushing her yielding body to him.

There was no verbal answer. Monica remained passive. The joy of those protecting arms had left her speechless. But her warm lips were nevertheless eloquent, and he was satisfied.

After a few delirious moments his embrace relaxed. Quite abruptly his hands unclasped about her. He raised them to the warm flesh of her shoulders, and, gently grasping them, held her at arms' length from him.

His head was bent forward, and his passionate eyes searched her face, but they could not penetrate the fringed lids which were lowered before her eyes lest he should see too deeply into the secrets of her woman's soul.

"Mon, my Mon," he cried, in a low voice. "Look up. Look up into my eyes and tell me. Look up, and tell me you —love me, with all your soul. Look up, and tell me that you'll give up all the world—everything—for me. I can't do with less," he went on hotly. "If you could only see into

my heart you'd understand. But you can't. There's nothing and no one in the world for me but you, and I want you—all. D'you understand, Mon? I want no less, and you must tell me now—now—that this is your love for me, as it is mine for you."

He paused, waiting for his answer, but remained gazing with devouring eyes upon the beauty that so ravished his senses. At last the eyelids slowly lifted. The doors of the woman's soul were opened, and he gazed within. And while he gazed her opening lips thrilled him as his ears drank in the answer that came from them.

"I love you, dear," she murmured, with a softness indescribable. "I love you—best in all the world."

Then a shy smile lit her fair face, and she clung to him, hiding it against his breast.

"Best in all the world," he repeated ardently. "Mon, it's good to hear. So good. Say, and you're *my* best in all the world. You always will be. You are before all things in my life."

Then came long, silent moments, moments in which heart beat to heart and no spoken word but must have robbed them of something of their rapture. They were moments never to come again as long as both might live. With all the strength of mature years they loved for the first time, and the ripeness of imagination swept them with a perfect storm of delirious joy. They were moments when soul is laid bare to soul, and every nerve and sense is tuned in perfect sympathy. They were moments when the glad outpourings of two hearts mingled in a common flood which swept unchecked, unguided, speeding on to that far dreamland of perfect bliss.

Such moments are mercifully brief, or the balance of mind would soon stand in mortal jeopardy. So it came that later on the harmonious flood, speeding distantly from its source, lessened its frantic speed, and gently fell to a stream of calm delight.

They sat together talking, talking joyously of all those things which concerned the merging of their two lives. For Monica all her troubles, all her self-inflicted tortures were past and done with. There were no shadows. There was nothing on the horizon of her life to mar the sheen of a perfect, sunlit sky.

For the man those moments meant the crowning of his life's ambitions, the crowning of all that was best in him. He asked no more of the gods of fortune. So the tension of the force which always spurred him was relaxed, and, for the time, at least, he lay supine in the arms of his own dreaming senses, basking in the realms of Love's pleasant sunlight.

Then the spell was finally broken. Sanity was reawakened by the ticking clock, which stood among the trifling ornaments upon Monica's desk. The man became aware of its hands. The irresistible march of time would not be denied. He nodded at the accusing face without any enthusiasm.

"It's nearly seven," he said, with a smile. "Shall we go, or shall we——?"

His voice was caressing, and its caress was hard for the woman to resist. She knew that it was only for her to shake her head, and these moments of delight would be prolonged indefinitely.

The temptation was great. Then, with all a loving woman's understanding of such things, she decided that the sparing of such moments would keep the store longer.

"We'd better go," she said decidedly. Then she deferred to him. "Don't you think so?"

Hendrie smiled happily. It was a new pleasure to find himself obedient to another's whim.

"Yes," he said, promptly acquiescing. "You run along and get your wraps, while I go and see if the car is ready downstairs."

With a final embrace Monica hurried into her bedroom.

Hendrie prepared to depart downstairs. But a final glance at the clock arrested him, and he stood staring at the desk.

Slowly a flush crept into his lean cheeks, and the softness of his steady eyes gave place to the usual cold light with which the man was accustomed to face his world. The coldness changed again to a curious sparkle—a sparkle which would not have found its way there with any other eyes to witness it.

He took a step toward the desk and picked up an embossed silver photograph frame and stared down at the picture it contained. For a moment he only noted the details of the face it portrayed.

It was the picture of a man, a handsome, powerfully built

young man, dressed in flannels. The sweater he wore enhanced his wonderfully athletic figure, and added a fine setting for the well-poised head. The photographer had done his work well, for never had Alexander Hendrie looked upon a more perfect picture of magnificent manhood.

The glitter in his eyes hardened, and slowly a deep intense fire grew in their depths. His brows drew together, and he glowered with something like deadly hatred upon the offending picture. Suddenly he replaced it upon the desk, and, with a nervous thrust, his hands sought his trousers pockets, while he deliberately took a step toward the door. But he went no further. He swung about, and picked up the frame again.

At that moment Monica re-entered from the bedroom.

A sudden terror leaped into her eyes as she recognized the silver frame in his hand. One swift glance of his hot eyes left her terror apparent to him. He needed no more. A furious rage mounted to his brain. It was a rage of jealousy. The first passion of jealousy he had ever known, and he felt as though he were going mad.

But a powerful restraint, the habit of years, served him. With one jerk of his muscular fingers the back of the frame was torn out, and the photograph removed. Then the frame fell to the floor, and its glass was shattered.

"Who's picture is this?" he demanded.

Monica strove to steady her shaking limbs. She cleared her throat.

"Why—that's—that's the son of an old friend of mine," she cried desperately. "I've known him all his life."

The man deliberately tore the picture across. He tore it across again. Then he walked over to the stove. He opened it. One by one he dropped the fragments of Frank Burton's picture into the heart of the glowing coal. Then he reclosed the door.

The next moment Monica was in his arms, and his eyes were devouring her beautiful, frightened face.

"Guess you'll know him no more," he cried, with a laugh, which only seemed to accentuate the fury of his jealousy. "No more. There's just one man in this world for you now, and that man is——"

He broke off and released her. Then, with a sudden return

to his normal manner, and all sign of his mad jealousy passed, he led her toward the door.

"Say, there's going to be no more shadows around, no more shadows to—spoil things. The car's waiting—ready."

CHAPTER V

IN THE SPRINGTIME

A GRAY twilight stealing across the sky heralded the coming of day. It was spring upon the flooded prairielands of Canada; a season which is little more than a mere break between an almost sub-tropical summer and the harshest winter the world knows.

In the shadows of dawn the country looked like one vast marshland, rather than the rich pastures and fertile wheat country, which, in days yet to come, will surely fill the stomach of the whole human world. Wide stretches of water filled the shallow hollows; those troughs between the mountainous rollers of grass, where the land rose like the swell of a wind-swept ocean.

These wide expanses of water were all that was left of snow to the depth of several feet; and in their turn would soon enough be licked up by a thirsty summer sun. This was the annual fertilizing process which left these hundreds of thousands of square miles capable of a harvest which might well set weeping with envy the toil-worn husbandman of older countries.

Just now it was the feed ground of migratory visitors from the feathered world. Also it had consequently become the happy hunting-ground of every man and boy in the neighborhood capable of carrying a gun. They were all there, waiting in perfect silence, waiting with a patience which nothing else could inspire, for the golden light of day, and the winging of the unsuspecting birds.

The dim, yellow streak on the eastern horizon widened, and the clacking of perhaps a hundred thousand tongues screamed out their joy of life. Doubtless the affairs of the day were being discussed, quarrels were being satisfactorily adjusted, courtships were in progress, hasty meals and fussy

toilets were being attended to. Doubtless in such a vast colony as had settled in the long hay slough, which looked like a broad, sluggish river, the affairs of life were as important as they are among the human denizens of a city. The clatter and hubbub went on, and left the rest of the world indifferent, as such clatter generally does.

Old Sam Bernard and his pupil, Frank Burton, were among the waiting guns. The light was not yet sufficient, and the geese had not yet begun to rise. They were both armed with ten-bore, double-choke guns, the only weapons calculated to penetrate the heavy feathers of such magnificent game. Both were lying full-length upon the sodden highlands which lined the slough, thrilling with the inspiring tension of keen sportsmen. Their half-bred spaniels crouched between them, their silky bodies quivering with joyous excitement, but their well-trained minds permitting no other demonstration. It was a moment worth living for, both for men and dogs.

At last there came a heavy whirring sound down at the water. In a moment a great gray bird sailed up, winging in a wide circle toward Frank's deadly gun. It was the signal waited for. The dogs beat a tattoo with their feathered front feet. A thrill shot down the two men's spines. Both raised their guns, but it was the sharp crack of the younger man's which sent the bird somersaulting to the ground.

Now the whole length of the slough became alive with whirring wings and snapping guns. The panic of the birds was complete. The air was full of cumbersome speeding creatures, winging their way across the danger zone in their unhappy quest of safety. Everywhere they paid the heavy toll demanded of them; and in less than half an hour five hundred brace and more had fallen to the forty-odd guns waiting for them.

But the shoot did not finish there. That was the first rush. That was the pot hunting. The real sport of the morning came with the scattering and high flying of the terrified birds, shooting which required the greatest keenness and skill. Here the older hand had all the best of it, for coolness and judgment alone could fill the bag. The shoot went on well into the morning, and not until the birds became so wild that they utterly refused to come within range did the counting of the bag begin.

By ten o'clock Sam Bernard and his pupil were returning home to the old man's farm in a buckboard laden down with nearly a hundred birds. It had been a great shoot, and Frank's enthusiasm was almost feverish.

"It's the greatest game," he declared. "Forty-seven brace! Say, Sam, shall we get any more of 'em to-morrow?"

Sam flicked the mare with the whip as he shook his gray head.

"Guess not," he said, slowly rolling a chew of tobacco into the other cheek. They've smelled powder, an' I'd sure say it's a bokay they ain't yearnin' to sniff again. They'll be miles away by mornin'."

"Seems a pity," murmured the blue-eyed giant beside him.

The old man's eyes twinkled.

"Maybe so," he observed. "I used to feel like that. Guess I don't now.

"You mean a second go wouldn't be so—fine."

The gray head nodded.

"Guess when I die I don't fancy no resurrectin' racket. I can't say but what I've lived most every day of my life—but ther's nothin' on this earth worth repeatin'—not even shootin' up a flock o' foolhead geese."

Frank's eyes became pensive.

"P'raps you're right."

The farmer chirruped at his horse.

"It's jest a notion," he said indifferently. Then he pointed out ahead with his whip. His wife was standing waiting for them at the door of the farm house.

"There's the gentlest soul living'," he observed, with a smile. "Guess she couldn't wring a chicken's neck to save her life. But she'll sure handle these birds, an' reckon 'em up, with as much delight as a cannibal nigger smacks his lips over a steak off his pa's quarters."

This man who was teaching him the business of farming was always a source of amusement to young Frank, and he laughed cordially at the absurdity of his comparison. Nor could he help watching the old farm-wife as they drove up. True enough the sight of the well-filled carry-all gladdened her eyes.

"Guess I don't need to ask no fool questions about your sport," she cried. "Say, ain't they great? Look at 'em, all

bustin' with fat. They'll make real elegant eatin'. They surely will. How many? Forty-seven brace? Why don't you say it right? Ninety-four birds. The pore harmless birdies. I'd surely say you're the two worstest villains on two legs. But they'll make elegant eatin'. They will that."

The two men exchanged smiling glances as they unloaded the buckboard. Then, as the choreman took it away to the barn, Mrs. Bernard remembered what was, perhaps, the most interesting thing in the life of the Canadian farmer. A neighbor had brought out their mail from Gleber that morning. She dived into a capacious pocket in her ample print skirt, and her russet face smiled up into Frank's blue eyes.

"My, but them birds has surely set me daft an' forgettin'," she cried. "Here's your mail, boy Frank," she added, pulling out a bulky envelope. "Jest one letter. An' it's a female writin' on it. Always a female writin'. You surely are some with the gals."

Frank took his letter with a smile at the old woman's genial chaff. As he was about to pass into the house to change his wet clothes Sam called out—

"You don't need to hurry. Jest read your mail, an' when you're through changin', guess we'll get right on down to the forty-acre patch. We'll need to finish seedin' there this week. Say——"

"Yes." Frank paused in the doorway.

The old man grinned as he glanced in the direction of the cold storehouse, whither his wife had gone with some of the birds.

"It don't make no difference to a woman," he said. "Don't matter if it was your Gran'ma instead of your Ma that was writin' you, she'd guess it was a sparkin' letter from some gal. Women is queer most ways."

"Sure, Sam," Frank replied soberly. "Guess that's why we like 'em."

"Like 'em? Well, I'd smile."

Up in the attic, in the pitch of the roof, which served Frank as a bedroom, he sat down on the side of his bed to read his letter. The little place was homely and clean, but there were no comforts. There was not even a chair. Just the bare necessities, and they were ample for a youth as plain and cleanly living as its present occupant.

For some moments the letter remained unopened in Frank's hand, and it was, perhaps, the first time in his life that he had reluctantly contemplated his mother's handwriting. He certainly was reluctant now. It was not that he was not at all times delighted to receive word from her, but he knew, and was apprehensive of the contents of this bulky package. It was the first letter he had received from Monica since her marriage to Hendrie, which he knew had taken place nearly a month previously.

How many times had he tried to convince himself of his pleasure in his mother's contemplated happiness? How many times had he argued and debated with himself, pointing out the naturalness, the desirability of it from a worldly point of view? How much his mother deserved the happiness he knew was now hers. He looked at the whole thing without thought of self; he looked at it with all the generosity of a goodly nature; he looked at it with eyes just beginning to open upon the life moving about him; and though he reassured himself again and again, he knew that he regretted her action, and regretted it more than all for her own sake. It oppressed him with a sense of coming disaster which he could not shake off.

He had not had an easy time since his flying visit to Winnipeg. Far from it. His devotion to his mother had fought and conquered the natural resentment and bitterness her story of his birth had inspired. But the effect of that battle remained. He knew that he was not as other men, he knew that he was not entitled to the same privileges as they. In a measure he was an outcast among his kind, and the finger of pitying scorn must always be leveled at him wherever the truth of his parentage became known.

It was a painful blight under which to set out to face the world, and he felt like the leper of old, driven by the rest of a wholesome world to hide in the dim recesses of a wilderness, whither the eyes of man might not see him, and contact with his fellows became impossible.

These were his feelings, but he had no thought of putting such ideas into practice. Nor had he any intention of allowing them to embitter him. He was young, his life, and a great capacity for its enjoyment, lay all before him. He would forget. He would make himself forget. He would

live like all those others he saw about him. He would work, play; he would love. For in spite of the accident of his birth all these things were part of the life given him.

At last he tore open the envelope, and, in a moment, became absorbed in its contents. Here were the same warm words of affection he was accustomed to. The same ardent desire for his welfare; and, through it all, and through the sober accounts of her marriage, and the progress of her new life, which was all she could desire, ran that thrilling note of joy which told him of the completeness of her happiness.

And yet he was not satisfied.

The shadow was there lurking about him. It was in the corners of his sunny room, it floated about his head like an invisible pall, the presence of which depressed him. Nor could he rid himself of its oppressive weight.

The last page of his letter he read twice over, and, at the second reading, he knew the source whence the shadow had sprung. The danger for his mother lay in him. In his simple existence. He knew it. Not only did he know that her danger lay in him, but he knew that some sort of disaster would come through him. He rose and paced the floor, and as he paced he swore to himself that he would destroy his life rather than she should ever suffer through him.

After a while, his feelings became relieved, and he turned again to that ominous last page, so full of kindly thought for him.

"I believe I am on the track of the very farm for you It is a fine place, my agent tells me, dear boy. It consists of a whole section of land, with more to be acquired adjoining. Furthermore, it has three hundred and twenty acres already fenced, and some excellent buildings. It also has a water front of half a mile on Fish Creek with plenty of excellent timber. This is going for $7000. The agent assures me it is a gift at the price. It was built by two rich English boys who got tired of it, and went back home. Now, I shall be at Deep Willows, our great farm, on May 15 *by myself.* Alexander has to be in Chicago then. He wanted me to go with him, but I persuaded him to let me go to Deep Willows by myself that I might enjoy exploring its mag-

nificence. This, of course, was just an excuse so that I could meet you there and discuss the farm, and see about these things. You must run over as soon after that date as possible. It's less than thirty miles from Gleber, so you can easily manage it."

There was more of it, much more, but Frank did not read further. He looked up with troubled eyes. Here, here was the threat overshadowing them both. He saw it in the subterfuge by which his mother was seeking to meet him. He saw it in the fearless manner in which she deliberately refused to shut him out of her life. Why not send him the money, and let him conduct his own affairs independently of her? It would, at least, be safe. And, in the midst of all his trouble, absurdly enough, he remembered Sam Bernard's remark: "Women is queer most ways."

He smiled in spite of himself, but his smile did not for a moment ease his anxiety for his mother.

Suddenly he heard the familiar voice of Sam calling up the narrow stairs to him—

"Ho, Frank! You ready?"

Frank thrust the letter in his pocket, and, regardless of the fact he had not yet changed his clothes, hastily called back—

"Coming right along!"

Downstairs the old man's twinkling eyes greeted him.

"Guess your mail took a heap o' readin'—you ain't changed."

Frank smiled back at him.

"No," he said abstractedly, for he was thinking of other things.

"Jest so," retorted the old man promptly. Then, with a shrug: "Anyway, love letters are warm enough to dry most things. Say——"

"It was from my mother."

"Ah."

"And I want to ask you if you'll give me the afternoon off. I'd like to go across to the Raysun's."

The old man eyed him shrewdly.

"I didn't reckon to, lad," he said, after a moment's thought. "You see the seedin' needs to get on. But I

guess you best go. Letters from your Ma generly need talkin' over with your best gal—'fore you're married."

The old man's quiet geniality was quite irresistible, and Frank thanked him warmly. The more surely because he had come very near to guessing the purpose he had in making this visit. But his purpose was rather in consequence of, than to discuss his mother's letter. It was a purpose he had impulsively decided upon for no better reason than that all subterfuge was utterly repulsive to him, and he felt that before it was too late Phyllis must be told the painful truth about himself.

In some measure his sudden decision comforted him, as he thought of the secret fashion in which it was demanded of him that he should visit his mother. At least there should be no such lack of openness between himself and the girl he hoped some day to make his wife.

CHAPTER VI

LIFE THROUGH OTHER EYES

Phyllis Raysun was quite a remarkable girl when her parentage and simple, yet strenuous, upbringing were considered. Her beauty was quite decided, and was admitted even by those female souls who were really fond of her. She was dark, with large, dark eyes, deeply fringed with black lashes, almost Celtic in their depth and sleepy fire. And with it all she wore an expression of keenness and decision at all times. She was tall, of a height which always goes so well with a purposeful face such as hers; and the delightful contours of her figure were all the more gracefully natural for the absence of corsets. But wherein lay the unusual side of her personality was the unconventional views of life she already possessed at the age of eighteen years. The breadth of them was often quite disconcerting in one so young, and frequently it made her the despair of her plump and doting, and very ordinarily helpless mother.

Perhaps her mother's helplessness may have accounted in some measure for Phyllis's unusual mental development. It may have had a pronounced influence upon her, for they

two were quite alone. Years ago, when she was an infant, her father had died, leaving her mother in sorely straitened circumstances.

From her earliest years Phyllis had had to think for herself, and help in the struggle against poverty. Then, as she grew older, she realized that they possessed a wholly neglected property which should yield them a living. So she set to work on the farm, and, little by little, she wrested from the soil that profit, which, as the years went on, gradually lifted them both from the depths of penury to a frugal comfort. Now the farm was nearing prosperity, and, with the aid of a hired man, Phyllis worked it with all the skill of an expert and widely experienced farmer.

Her mother was simply a chorewoman; a capable enough woman in this lowly capacity. She could never hope to rise above it. Nor was Phyllis ever disturbed by the knowledge. She valued the usefulness of her mother's work too well, and, besides, she loved the helpless old body, and delighted in the care of her as though she were some small child of her own.

Phyllis had spent her morning out seeding, as every other farmer in the district was doing, while her hired man was busy with plough and team breaking the last year's fallows. The work was arduous and monotonous, but the girl felt neither of these things. She loved her little homestead with its hundred and sixty acres, and she asked nothing better than to tend it, and watch, and reap the results. She was robust in mind and body, and none of the claims of this agricultural life came amiss to her.

But during the past six months a new interest had come into her life in the shape of a blue-eyed male giant of her own age; and from the moment she first set eyes upon him an added glow lit the heavens of her consciousness. She did not recognize its meaning at first. Only she realized that somehow the winter days were less dark and irksome, and an added zest became apparent in the everlasting looking forward.

But by degrees he became an intimate in her life, and, finally, almost part of it. It was a wonderful time for Phyllis. Through it all he was always associated with the first apparition she had had of him. In her dreaming mind,

as she went about her work, she always saw him as she had seen him then, sitting on the back of a beautiful East-bred, golden chestnut horse, disconsolately viewing the distance with questioning blue eyes, seeking a direction he had absolutely lost.

That was her first meeting with Frank Burton, and somehow she had been glad, from the first moment she set eyes on him, that hers had been the opportunity of relieving him from the dilemma in which he had found himself.

Since then their friendship had ripened quickly. The pulses of youth had been quickly stirred, and almost before Phyllis was aware of it that glorious early spring day had dawned when the great golden sun of love had burst upon her horizon, and turned a chill, snow-clad world into a perfect poet's dream of delight.

Without a second thought she engaged herself to the boy, and the boy engaged himself to her. They loved, so what mattered anything else in the world? Their blood ran hot in healthy veins, and the whole wide world lay before them.

Phyllis was returning at midday with the old mare that hauled her seeder. As she came she was reckoning up the time which the rest of the seeding would take. This year an added twenty-five acres was to be put under crop, and time in spring was always the farmer's nightmare. She had completed her figures by the time she drew near the house, when, looking up, with satisfied eyes, she beheld the figure of the man, whose presence never failed to raise a smile of delight in her eyes, standing at the door talking to her mother.

"Ho, Frank!" she cried out joyously.

The man turned at once and answered her greeting, but the smile on his handsome face had little of the girl's unqualified joy in it. Her sensitive feelings quickly detected the lack, and she understood that there was something amiss. Frank came swiftly across to her, and relieved her of the mare, which he led to the barn while Phyllis walked at his side.

"I just felt I had to come over, Phyl," he said impulsively. "I couldn't pass another night until I had seen you and told you all. I'm—I'm utterly miserable. I——"

They had reached the barn and Phyllis halted.

"You put the mare in, and feed her hay," she interrupted him quickly. "Dan will feed her oats and water her when he comes in."

Her manner was studiously matter of fact. She had realized at once that Frank's condition must not be encouraged. So she remained outside the barn, and waited for him.

The boy found her sitting on the tongue of the wagon which stood close by, and the misery in his eyes deepened as he surveyed the charming, pensive face he loved so dearly.

"Come and sit here, Frank. Then you can tell me about it."

Phyllis looked up at him in that tender, mothering way she had learned in her years of care for her only parent.

The man obeyed, and, for the first time since he had left Sam Bernard's farm that morning, a genuine smile of something like contentment lit his hitherto somber face.

"Phyl," he cried suddenly, "you—you make me feel better already. You—oh, it's wonderful the influence you exercise over me. I——"

He broke off, and, seizing her two hands, bent over and kissed her on the lips.

"That's better," the girl exclaimed happily, when he had released her. "When two people really love each other they can generally manage to set the worst of any shadows scooting off to the dark places they belong."

The man smiled in spite of himself.

"But—but it's serious. It really is. It's simply awful."

The girl's eyes were just a shade anxious, but her manner was lightly tender.

"Of course it is. It surely is. Say, Frank, everything's awful that makes us unhappy. And I guess something's made you real unhappy. Now, just get very busy and tell me all about it."

The man sat with his great body drooping forward, and his hands clasped, and hanging between his parted knees.

"Unhappy? It's—it's worse than that. I—I came over here to tell you that—that you can have your promise back—if you want it."

It was out. He had blurted it clumsily he knew, but it

was out. And now he sat fearing to look up into the truthful eyes he loved so dearly.

Phyllis drew a sharp breath. She looked straight ahead of her for one brief moment while her sunny cheeks paled. Then the soft color came back to them, and, presently, a very tender, very wise pair of eyes studied his dejected profile.

"And if I don't want it—back?" she said gently.

Frank raised his miserable eyes and looked straight into hers.

"But you will when you know all," he cried, almost passionately. "I know it. I feel it. I know that a good, honest girl like you could not bear disgrace. No disgrace has ever touched you, and, through me, no disgrace ever shall. When I asked for your promise I did not know all I know now. If I had I would rather have cut off my right hand than attempt to win your love. And now—now I know that I had no right to it. I have no right to any good woman's love. I—I have no right to anything. Not even to my name."

"Frank!"

Another sharp intake of breath came with the girl's exclamation.

"Yes, I mean it," the boy went on, with passionate misery. "I have known it for six weeks, and I should have told you before, but—but I hadn't the courage, the honesty. I—I have no legitimate father. I—I am a bastard."

He made his final statement with his eyes upon the ground. To see this great, honest boy bowed with such a sincerity of misery was too much for Phyllis.

"You didn't *win* my love, Frank," she said, with eyes that were tenderly smiling. "I gave it to you—quite unasked. I gave it to you such a long—long time ago. I think I must sure have given it you before ever I saw you. And—and as for my promise, I guess that was given most at the same time—only I just didn't know 'bout it. I don't think I could take my promise back if I felt that way. But I don't—not if you'd like to keep it."

"Phyl, Phyl!" The boy's eyes were shining, but his sense of right made him protest. "You don't know what you're doing. You surely don't. Think of it. I—I have no real

name. Think what folks'll say when they know. Think of the disgrace for you. Think of your girl friends. Phyllis Raysun marrying a—bastard. Oh, it's awful."

"You do love me, Frank, don't you?"

The girl's question came so simply that Frank turned in astonishment. The next moment she was in his arms, and the joy of his hot kisses pervaded her whole body.

"Love you? Love you?" he cried. "You're all the world to me."

Presently she released herself from his embrace and smiled up into his face.

"Then what in the world else matters to—us?" she demanded frankly.

Then she went on, looking straight before her at the tumbled-down sod house which had been her home ever since her birth.

"Listen," she said. "You are illegitimate. I won't have that other word. It's brutal, and it's not right anyway. Do you ever think of our poor little lives? I do—often. Guess I've thought so much I wonder folks make all the to-do they do about lots of things that can't possibly matter. What is life? Why, it's a great big machine sort of thing that none of us, the wisest, don't know a thing about. Why is it? Where does it come from? What is it? Is it? No, not the wisest man in all the world can answer one of those questions right. He can't. He can't. And yet everybody gets busy making crazy little regulations for running it. Do you see? We're built and developed by this wonderful, wonderful machine thing, and then we turn right around and tell anybody, even, yes, the wonderful machine thing that made us itself, how we should live the life which has already been arranged for.

"Frank dear," she hurried on eagerly, "it's almost funny, only it's all so plumb crazy. Do you ever go to Meeting? I mean church?"

"I'm afraid I don't," Frank admitted ruefully.

"I do," cried the girl. "Oh yes, I do." Then she laughed. "It's more funny than you'd expect, if—if you only think about it. I always think a lot when I go. It makes me think, but not in the way the parson would have me. I always start thinking about him. It seems so queer, him

standing up there talking Bible stuff, and telling you what it means, just, for all the world, as if he'd wrote it, and knew all about it; just as if he was a personal friend of that great machine thing that keeps this world buzzing around and sets us feeling, and doing, and happy, and miserable. Then he gets paid like any hired man for talking to us all, just as if we were silly folk who couldn't think just as well as him. But he don't really think far. He just tells you what he's told to tell you by those who pay him his wages, and if he told you anything else he'd lose his job, and maybe have to plow for a living, and then be told by some other feller every seventh day he was a fool and a sinner.

"Then you go to another church—or meeting house. It used to make me real bad one time. But it doesn't now, because I'm getting to understand better. Well, at the other place they tell you all different. And while you're listening it makes you think the other feller's a fool, and—and ought to be making hay, or maybe eating it. Then you get mazed up with so much contradiction about Life, and God, and all the other things, so you find another church. Then that feller gets up and tells you that none of the others have got it right—no one else in the world but him, as the representative of his particular religion. And he asks you to help him send out missionaries, and things, to tell everybody that don't think the same as him they're fools and worse, and—and—they're all going plumb to hell—wherever that is.

"Now what does it all come to, Frank?" she cried, with eyes glowing and cheeks flushed with enthusiasm. "Why, just this. We're born into this world, which is a wonderful, wonderful place, through none of our doing. A big God, somewhere, gives us our life, and implants in us a wonderful sense of right and wrong, and we've just got to use it the best we know. We don't know anything beyond the limits of understanding He's given us, and He doesn't intend us to know more. He just seems to say, 'Go right along and work out your own salvation; and when you've done, I'll come along and see how you've been doing, and, maybe, I'll fix it so your failures won't happen in the newer lives I set going.' That's how it seems to me. So you don't need to listen more than you want to what other folks, no wiser than

yourself, tell you of what's right and what's wrong. You don't; because they don't know any better than you—and that's a fact. So when you come and tell me you're disgraced, just because your pa and momma weren't preached at by a feller all dressed in white, and they didn't have bells ringing, and she didn't have a trousseau, and the folks didn't get around and make speeches, and pile a shower of paper stuff down their backs, I say you're not. None of it matters. Nothing in the whole wide world matters—so long as we don't let go our hold on that sense of right and wrong which the good God gave us. That's all that really does matter to us. It's no concern of ours what folks who came before us did, or the doings of folks who're coming after. We've got to do our work. We've got to love and live till it pleases our great big God to tell us to stop. And I'm most sure if we do that, and hold tight to our sense of right and wrong, and act as it prompts us, we're just doing His Will—as He wants us to do it."

Frank sat staring in wide astonishment at the girl's flushed face and bright, enthusiastic eyes. But the effect of her words, her understanding of things, upon him was none the less. He felt the great underlying truth in all she said, and it brought him a measure of comfort which his own lack of real thought had left him without.

"Phyl!" he almost gasped.

The girl broke into happy laughter.

"Say, Frank," she cried, "don't tell me I'll—I'll go to hell for it all. I—I couldn't stand that—from you."

The boy shook his head. He, too, joined in the laugh. He felt he wanted to laugh. It was as though she had suddenly relieved him of an intolerable burden.

"I wouldn't tell you that, Phyl," he said, with heavy earnestness. "You'll go somewhere, but it won't be—to hell."

"And—and you don't want me to take my promise back?" she asked him, her gray eyes sobering at once.

"No, dear, I just love you more than ever." He sighed in great contentment. "And we'll get married as soon—as soon as mother buys me the farm she's going to. She's written me about it to-day."

"Ah, yes, that farm." Phyllis rested her chin upon her hand, and gazed out at the old house abstractedly.

"It's to be a swell place," the boy went on.

"I'm so glad, Frank," she replied absently. Then she recalled her dreaming faculties. "And—your momma's giving it to you? She must be very rich."

Frank flushed and turned his eyes away.

"She has a good deal of money," he said awkwardly.

The girl seemed to understand. She questioned him no further.

"She must be a good and kind woman," she said gently. "I hope some day I may get—to know her."

"I——"

Frank broke off. The promise he was rashly about to make remained unspoken. He knew he could not promise anything in his mother's name—now.

CHAPTER VII

HAPPY DAYS

Angus Moraine was a dour, hard-headed business man such as Alexander Hendrie liked to have about him. He was also an agriculturalist from his finger-tips to his backbone, and the millionaire's great farm at Deep Willows owed most of its prosperity to this hard, raw-boned descendant from the Crofters of Scotland.

When he heard of his friend and employer's forthcoming marriage he shook his head, and his lean face took on an expression of added sourness. He saw visions of his own sphere of administration at Deep Willows becoming narrowed. He felt that the confidence of his employer was likely to be diverted into another channel. This meant more than a mere outrage to his pride. He knew it might affect his private pocket in an adverse degree. Therefore the news was all the more unwelcome.

Pondering on these matters while on a round of inspection of the far-reaching wheat-lands which he controlled, he abruptly drew up his sturdy broncho in full view of a great gray owl perched on the top of a barbed wire fence-post. He sat there surveying the creature for some moments, and finally apostrophized it, feeling that so uncanny and secretive a fowl was an admirable and safe recipient for his confidences.

"It's no sort of use, my gray and ugly friend," he said, in his wry way. "Folks call Master Alexander the Napoleon of the wheat world, and I'm not saying he isn't. But Napoleons generally make a mess of things when they marry. Their business is fighting, or—they wouldn't be Napoleons."

Quite apart from his own interests he felt that Hendrie was making a grave mistake, and, later on, when he learned that he had married his secretary, his conviction became permanent. This time his disapproval was directed at the map of Alberta, which hung upon his office wall. He shook his bony forefinger with its torn and dirty nail at the silent witness, his narrow eyes snapping with angry scorn.

"Female secretaries are pernicious," he cried angrily. "They're worse'n a colony of gophers in a wheat patch. You want a temperature of forty below to keep your office cool with a woman working in it. Hendrie always hated the cold."

But his apprehensions did not end there. Later he learned that Deep Willows was to be Monica's future home, and the place was to be immediately prepared for her reception.

This time the telephone over which he had received his instructions got the full benefit of his displeasure.

It was cold and calm, and thoroughly biting.

"I'll need to chase a new job, or the old one'll chase me," he muttered, and the thermometer of his feelings for women, as a race, dropped far below the zero at which it had hitherto stood.

But there was far too much of the old Crofter's blood in Angus's veins to let him relinquish the gold mine which Hendrie's affairs were to him. However he disliked the new conditions of things he kept his feelings to himself, or only permitted their expression before silent witnesses. With all the caution of his forefathers he awaited developments, and refrained from any precipitate action; and, later on, he was more than glad he had exercised such restraint.

The necessary preparations were duly put in hand, and Angus supervised everything himself. Every detail was carried out with that exactness for which Hendrie's manager was noted. He spared no pains, and that was his way. His native shrewdness had long ago taught him how best he could serve his employer's interests, and, consequently, his

own. Implicit obedience to the millionaire left him with enormous pickings, and the building up of Hendrie's miniature world of wheat had left him comparatively a rich man, with small agricultural interests scattered all over the northwest. He was not the man to turn and rend the golden calf he worshiped, nor to attempt to cook his own tame golden goose in the fire of his displeasure. Besides, deep down in his rugged heart, he was utterly devoted to his employer. So he gave Monica and her husband a royal welcome to Deep Willows.

After all Monica was not permitted to explore Deep Willows by herself. Hendrie contrived to get his business in Chicago temporarily adjusted, and, as a surprise, explained at the last moment to his bride that he could not bring himself to permit her going to Deep Willows for the first time without him.

The news at once pleased and terrified Monica. Her thoughts flew to Frank, and her appointment with him, and it became necessary at once to despatch a "rushed" wire to put him off. When this had been done she felt more at ease, and abandoned herself to her pleasure in the thought that, after all, her husband was to accompany her to the home which she had decided should be theirs.

But it left her with a fuller understanding of the difficulties and dangers with which she was beset. She realized that an added caution was needed. That it would be so easy to make a slip, and so run the risk of wrecking her newly found happiness.

Yes, there was no denying it, she was utterly happy during those first weeks of her married life, and frequently she found herself wondering how she had had the courage to face the long years of her spinsterhood.

It had been worth waiting for. She had married the man of her choice, the one man in all the world who appealed to her as the very essence of all that was great, and strong, and lovable in manhood. Here was no weakling to appeal to her sense of motherhood, but a powerful, commanding, yes, even ruthless personality, upon which she could lean in times when her woman's heart needed such strong support.

Then, too, she saw a side of his character which the world was never likely to see, and her pride and delight in the

privilege were wholly womanly. To her he was the lover, tender, passionate, strong. And his jealous regard for her was an added delight to her woman's vanity and love.

The thought of his power in the world, his Napoleonic methods of openly seeking his adversary in the world of finance and crushing him to his will only made the intimacy of their lives all the sweeter to her. She was ambitious, ambitious for him, ambitious to stand at his side on every plane to which he soared.

Then came her arrival at Deep Willows; and at once she learned to her delight the chief reason of her husband's accompanying her.

She had expected a fine farm, built as farms were built in this new country. She had expected a great place, where comfort was sacrificed to the work in hand. She had expected the rush and busy life of a great commercial undertaking, wonderful organization, wonderful machinery, wonderful, crude buildings for the surer storing of crops. But, though she found all the wonders of machinery, all the busy life she had expected, all the buildings, she found something more, something she had not been led to expect in a man of Hendrie's plain tastes.

A miniature palace was awaiting her. A palace standing in its own wide grounds of park-like trees and delicious, shaded gardens. She found a home in which a king might have dwelt, one that had been designed by one of the most famous architects of the day.

It was set on the banks of a river, high up on a rising ground, whence, from its windows, a wide view of the almost illimitable wheat-fields spread out before the eyes, and, directly below, lay the roaring falls where the water of the river dropped churning into a wide gorge. Truly the setting of this home was as nearly perfect as a prodigal nature could make it.

The land in its immediate vicinity had no regularity; it was a tumbled profusion of natural splendor, perfectly trained in its own delightful disorder. The farm buildings were nowhere visible from the house or grounds. They were hidden behind a great stretch of woodland bluff so that nothing should spoil the view from the house. All that was visible was the wheat, stretching away in every direction

THEN CAME HER ARRIVAL AT DEEP WILLOWS

over the undulating plains as far as the eye could see, centering about this perfect heart, and radiating to a distance of something like five miles.

Such was the home which Monica's love for Hendrie had brought her; and the man's joy in offering it for her acceptance was a thing to remember all her life.

There was that light of perfect happiness in his gray eyes as he stood in what he called the office, but which was, in reality, a library furnished with every luxury unlimited wealth could command. He held out a long blue envelope on which her name was inscribed.

"Now, Mon," he said, in a sober way which his eyes belied, "I guess you've seen most all, and—and I've been real happy showing it you. Make me happier still by taking this. When you've read the contents, just have it locked away in your safe deposit. It's—it's a present for a good girl."

Monica drew out the papers and gasped out her delight when she discovered that they were a deed of gift to her of Deep Willows. The house, furniture, and the grounds as separate from the farm.

"It's—it's too much, Alec!" she cried. "Oh, I can scarcely believe it—scarcely believe it."

The man's face was a study in perfect happiness as he feasted his eyes upon her beautiful flushed face. The power to give in this princely fashion touched him more nearly than perhaps any other feeling, next to his love for her.

But his commercial instinct made him laugh.

"You'll believe it, dear," he said dryly, "if ever you get busy paying for its up-keep out of your marriage settlement."

That night Monica realized that the culminating day of her love and ambitions had drawn to a close. Such a day could never come again, such moments could never be experienced twice in a lifetime. Her good fortune had come at last, come in abundance. She was the wife of one of the country's richest and most successful men. His love for her, and her love for him was perfect, utterly complete. She owned a home whose magnificence any prince might envy. What more could she hope, or wish for? All that the world seemed to have to offer was hers. It was all too wonderful —too wonderful.

Then, strangely enough, in the midst of her content, her thoughts mechanically drifted to other scenes, other days. They floated back to the now dim and distant struggles that lay behind her, and at once centered round a blue-eyed, fair-haired boy whom she had mothered and watched grow to manhood.

She slept badly that night. Her sleep was broken, fitful; and every time she slept it was to dream of Frank, and every dream was of trouble, trouble that always involved him.

A week later the call of business took Hendrie away. Such were his interests that he could never hope to remain for long in any one place. He went away after a brief, characteristic interview with Angus Moraine.

It occurred in the library.

"Angus," he said, "I want you to get a grip on this. Henceforth my wife represents me in all matters to do with this place. She's a business woman. So I leave her to your care. But remember, she's—me."

At that moment Angus Moraine's cup of bitterness was filled to overflowing. He had seen it coming from the outset, and he cursed softly under his breath as the millionaire took his departure.

With Hendrie's going, Monica's thoughts were once more free to think of that other interest in her life. Nor was she the woman to abandon any course she had once embarked upon. If it had been Hendrie's pleasure to give to her, it was no less her pleasure to complete the equipment of Frank, which had been her life's endeavor. Now, with all the means ready to hand, she decided to act at once. So, to this end, she wrote him full and careful instructions.

Some days later a stranger registered at the Russell Hotel, in Everton, which was a small hamlet situated on the eastern boundary of Hendrie's farm. He was tall and young, blue-eyed and fair-haired, and he registered in the name of Frank Smith.

On the same day Angus Moraine received word from Monica's order, "small hell" reigned among his foremen the day. She said she intended to explore the country round about; she wanted to see something of its people.

With the coming of this order Angus understood that he was no longer master at Deep Willows, and his resentment was silent but deadly. He had foreseen the position. He had foreseen this ousting, he told himself, and now it had come. At no time was he an easy man, but he was reasonably fair and just to those who worked under him. It was only in moments when things went wrong with him that the harsh, underlying cruelty of his nature was displayed. Things had gone wrong with him now, and, on the day he received Monica's order, "small hell" reigned amongst his foremen and overseers. Just now he was going through an unhappy time, and he was determined that something of it should be passed on to those within his reach.

After a long day of arduous work he finally threw off the yoke of his labors, and prepared for his usual evening recreation. He had a fresh horse saddled, and rode off down the river towards Everton.

Here it was his nightly custom to foregather, and, in his choice, he proved something of his Scottish ancestry. He rarely missed his evening whisky in the office of the little hotel. It was his custom to sit there for two hours or so, reading papers and sipping his drink, listening to, but rarely taking part in, the gossip of the villagers assembled. The latter was partly from the natural unsociability of his disposition, and partly from pride of position. Here he was looked upon as a little king, and he was as vain as he was churlish.

He drew near his destination. In the dusk the few odd lights of Everton shone out through the bluff of trees, in the midst of which the village was set. The man's habit was very strong. He always rode at a rapid gallop the whole of the six miles to the village, and he always drew his horse down to a walk at this point, where the private track from the farm converged with the main trail. The main trail was an old trading route of the Indian days which cut its way through the heart of Hendrie's land. It followed the south bank of the river and crossed the water at this point. It was for the purpose of avoiding this ford that the private road had been brought into existence.

Likewise, at this point, Angus always filled and lighted his pipe, a rank-smelling briar, well burnt down on one

side. There was always reason for what he did. He rode hard to give himself ample time for his evening's recreation. He walked his horse at this point to cool him off. He lighted his evening pipe here because he was beyond the range of the fields of wheat, and though there was no fear of fire at this season of the year, he preferred the habit to the risk of inadvertently setting fire to the crops when they were ripened.

He pulled up his horse and struck a match, and, instantly, in the stillness of the evening, became aware of approaching wheels. He heard horses take the water at the ford; and so unusual was the phenomenon at this hour of the evening that he looked down the converging trail to see who was driving into the village.

He heard voices, and so still was the evening that their tones came to him distinctly. Two people were evidently in the vehicle; a man and a woman.

The horses had ceased to splash. He heard them coming up the slope, and, almost unconsciously, he drew back into the shadow of the trees. This left him with his view of the other trail shut off, but, ahead, he could see the convergence, and when the vehicle passed that point it would be in full view.

He waited. The horses were abreast of him, beyond the trees. Suddenly the sound of their hoofs died out. They had come to a standstill, and he heard voices again.

"Oh, Mon, it's been a glorious day. You are good to me. Was there ever such a woman in the world?"

It was a man's voice speaking. Angus had caught the name "Mon," and his ears strained doubly hard to hear all that passed between them. Now the woman was speaking. He heard her laugh, a laugh he perfectly well knew.

"Don't talk like that, you silly Frank," she cried. "But it has been a day, hasn't it? We've had it all to ourselves, without one single cloud to mar it. You'll be all right now. You can get back to the hotel and no one will be the wiser for our meeting. I'll write you when it is safe to come over again. It must be soon. I want you with me so much, and it is perfectly safe when Alec is away. Good night, dear boy."

Angus heard a sound and recognized it. She had kissed the man.

The blood mounted to his head. Then it receded, leaving him cold. He sat quite still.

A moment later he heard the man walking toward the junction of the roads. Then he heard the scuffle of horses' hoofs as the vehicle was turned about. And again he heard the animals take the water.

Still he sat on.

Presently he beheld a tall, burly figure in tweeds emerge from the other trail. He was a powerfully built man, and, even in that light, he could see the thick, fair hair under the brim of the stranger's prairie hat.

"So that's your game, mam, is it?" he muttered. "I guessed Hendrie had made a mess of things marrying his secretary. I—wonder."

He waited until the man had gained considerable distance. Then he lifted the reins, and permitted his impatient horse to walk on towards the village.

CHAPTER VIII

ANGUS HEARS SOME TALK

Angus Moraine's whole attitude toward Monica underwent a sudden change. That his feelings changed is doubtful. His feelings rarely changed about anything. However, where before an evident, but tacit antagonism underlaid all his service of the new mistress of Deep Willows, now he only too readily acquiesced to her lightest wish, and even went far out of his way to obtain her confidence, and inspire her good feeling toward him.

The unsuspicious Monica more than appreciated his efforts. He was her husband's trusted employee, he was a big factor in her husband's affairs, and it seemed good that she should be taken thus readily to the bosom of those who served the man she loved.

Her days were hours of delight that were all too short. Yet with each passing moment, she felt that she was safely drawing nearer the completion of those plans which she had

long ago designed for Frank. She knew that when finally settled, they would leave her without the tiniest shadow upon her horizon.

The affairs of the farm she intended purchasing were well in hand. She and Frank had inspected it together, and both had approved. Now it was only for the lawyers, whom Monica had been careful to let Frank employ to complete the arrangements, and for the money she must provide to be forthcoming.

In the meantime there was much to discuss, much to plan for the future, and, with Hendrie away, Monica did not hesitate to see Frank as often, perhaps more often than was necessary. Her husband always kept her posted as to his movements, and thus she was left perfectly safe and free for the repetition of these clandestine visits.

Had she only known that Angus had recognized her and witnessed her parting from Frank after inspecting the new farm, her peace of mind would have known none of the ease it now enjoyed. But she remained in ignorance of the fact, and the astute Scot was determined to give her no cause for suspicion. Thus had he adopted his fresh attitude, but for what more subtle reason it would have been difficult to say.

The change in his manner extended in other directions. It did not affect those who worked under him, but, to those whom he met during his evening recreations, it came well-nigh as a staggering surprise.

For some evenings no one commented upon it. Perhaps his geniality was so extraordinary that men doubted their senses, and wondered if it were not a delusion brought on by their mild, nightly potions. But it continued with such definite persistence that remark at last found expression.

The first mention of it came from Abe Hopkinson, who dealt in dry-goods and canned "truck." He was sitting with his feet thrust upon a table in the office of the Russell Hotel early one evening. For some time he had been reflectively chewing. Suddenly his face flushed with emotion. He could stand the doubt no longer.

"Say," he cried, thumping one heavily shod foot upon the well-worn blotter, and setting the inkstand rattling, "wot's hit old leather-belly?"

His inelegant inquiry was addressed to the company gen-

erally. Pete Farline, famed for his bad drugs and antiquated "notion" department, breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"I'm glad you ast that, Abe," he said. "I've been troubled some. Guessed I'd have to hit the water-wagon a piece."

Sid Ellerton looked up from the pages of a cheap magazine.

"Meaning the whisky souse from Scotland, via Deep Willows?" he asked vaguely, and returned to his reading.

A fair-haired little man, by name Josh Taylor, who spent his winter days dissecting frozen beef, and his summer evenings in his butcher's store smashing flies on the sides of beef with the flat of a knife, mildly reproved him.

"Guess you read too much fiction, Sid. It makes you ask fool questions. Who else would Abe be talkin' of but that haggis-faced moss-back from the Hebrides? Ain't he made us all feel queer these days an' days? Say, he's gettin' that soft I get around dead scared he'll get a fancy to kiss me."

Abe grinned over at Josh's hard face, with its unshaven chin, and his hair standing rigidly on his bullet head.

He shook his head.

"I'd say Angus is soft, but——"

A titter went round the room as Abe broke off. He had just seen the reflection of Angus Moraine in the broken mirror which adorned the opposite wall. He was standing in the doorway. Abe sat wondering how much of their talk the Scot had overheard when that individual's voice terminated the moment's merriment.

"Feeling good, boys?" he inquired, in his new tone of amiability.

Pete hastily jerked his feet on to the top of the cold stove, assuming a nonchalant air.

"Feelin' good, Mr. Moraine?" he exclaimed. "Why, I'd say. Say, this tarnation country's settling that rapid I had a new customer to-day. Guess I'm figgerin' to start a drug trust."

Angus smiled with the rest as he moved across to his usual seat, a rigid armchair under the lamp bracket on the wall. The table bell was within his reach, and he struck it, and picked up an illustrated Sunday paper more than a month old.

"Who was your customer?" he asked indifferently.

"Why, a guy that's been gettin' around a heap lately. He stops in this house when he comes. Dresses in fancy store clothes, and wears fair hair and blue eyes. Guess he's maybe twenty or more. Calls himself Frank Smith. He was buyin' fancy perfume for a lady."

Sid looked up.

"First got around soon after Mrs. Hendrie come to the farm," he said, and lost himself promptly in the pages of his magazine.

"I've seen him," Angus said quietly, without lifting his eyes from the absorbing colored illustrations. "A flash-looking feller."

"That's him," cried Pete quickly. "He ain't unlike Mr. Hendrie, only bigger. Guess he's a deal better to look at, too. Maybe he's a relation of the lady's."

"Maybe," muttered Angus indifferently. Then, as the hotel proprietor, who was also bartender and anything else required in the service of his house, appeared in answer to the bell, he ordered whisky, and nodded comprehensively at the company. "Take the orders," he said shortly.

But this was too much. Such a sensation could not be endured without some outward expression. Pete's feet fell off the stove with a clatter, and kicked the loose damper into the iron cuspidor. Abe swallowed his chew of tobacco and nearly choked. Sid Ellerton dropped his magazine, and, in his endeavor to save it from the splotches of tobacco juice on the floor, shot the chair from under him. Unfortunately the chair struck Josh violently on the knee as it overturned, and set the hasty butcher cursing with a fine discrimination.

However, these involuntary expressions of feeling subsided in time for each man to give his order, and Lionel K. Sharpe, the proprietor, precipitated himself from the room with his head whirling, and a wild fear gripping him lest Mr. Moraine's bill should be disputed at the end of the month.

Abe took a fresh chew, and Pete's feet returned to the top of the stove, but Josh's knee still ached when the drinks arrived. Nor did poor Sid's loss of interest in a love story, so hopelessly smeared with tobacco juice, prevent him brightening visibly as he received his refreshment.

The little man raised his glass to his lips and toasted his host.

"Here's 'how,' Mr. Moraine, sir," he said, with a smile, feeling that, after all, there were still compensations for the loss of a besmirched love story.

The chorus was taken up by the rest of the company, and they all solemnly drank. Somehow there was a pretty general feeling that it was not a moment for levity.

"Smith stopping here now?" inquired Angus, setting his glass down a moment later.

Abe turned to the tattered register.

"Booked in yesterday," he said, thumbing down the page which contained the list of a whole year's guests. "Ah—paid," he added, running his eye across to the "remarks" column. "Guess he's gone. I'd say that perfume was a parting gift to his lady friend, Pete."

"And who may she be?" inquired Angus, innocently turning the page of his paper.

No one answered him. An exchange of glances went round the room, carefully leaving the manager out.

Presently Angus looked up.

"Eh?" he demanded.

Abe cleared his throat.

"Guess I don't know of any female running loose around here. They've most all got local beaus," he said, while he shifted his position uncomfortably.

Sid caught his eye and shook his head.

"Can't say," he observed. "I see him once with a gal. They wer' a long piece off. She was tall an'—an' upstandin'. Didn't just recognize her."

"Guess I see him with her, too," put in Pete, almost eagerly. "Seen him several times with her. They were way out riding. I was too far off to see them right."

"She was tall, eh?" said Josh reflectively. "Guess that's who I met on the trail driving with him. Maybe she belongs to one of the farms."

"Maybe," muttered Angus dryly. "Anyway, I don't guess it's up to us to worry our heads gray over him and his lady friend. But it's good to see folks coming around. This place is surely going to boom, fellers. It's going to be a great town. Hendrie's working on a big scheme that's going

to bring the railway through here, and set values going u sky high. Don't say I told you nothing. I've closed a deal in town lots for myself, and if you've got any spare dollars I'd advise——"

He broke off and looked across at the doorway as another townsman came in. It was Charlie Maybee, the postmaster.

"Evening, boys. Evening, Mr. Moraine," he cried, his genial face beaming cordially on everybody. "Say, Mr. Moraine, I guessed maybe I'd find you. I got some mail here for Mrs. Hendrie. It's local, and addressed to the post-office. We don't get mail much that way, so I thought I'd hand it to you. It'll save the lady comin' along in for it."

He produced the letter and handed it to Angus while accepting his invitation to drink.

"Mailed locally?" the manager inquired casually.

"Yes, This morning."

"Ah."

The keen-eyed Scot intercepted another exchange of meaning glances, and looked from one to the other with some severity.

"Say," he cried, with a sudden and studied return to his usual dour manner, "some of you boys seem to be saying one thing and—thinking another. Maybe you know something about this letter."

An instant denial leaped to everybody's lips, but Angus was playing his part too well for these country town-folk. He maintained his atmosphere of displeasure and suspicion, and finally the impulsive butcher cleared his throat.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed nervously. "What's the use beatin' around? We're all good friends right here, an' we all feel that we owe Mr. Hendrie a mighty lot for what he's doing for this city. An', I guess, when there's things goin' on that don't seem right by him it's up to us to open our mouths. We don't know a thing about that letter, Mr. Moraine, but it just fits in with things we do know—all of us. We know that just as soon as Mr. Hendrie disappears from the farm some other feller appears, and his name's Frank Smith, and he mostly gets around riding and driving with Mrs. Hendrie. That's what we know."

The butcher's forehead was beaded with perspiration as

he came to the end of his statement, but he stared defiantly round at the disapproving faces of his friends.

Angus fixed him with a stern eye.

"You surely do know a lot," he exclaimed, with angry sarcasm. "And I want to tell you that I know a lot—too. This is what I know. What you're saying is a damned scandal. Do you get me? A damned scandal," he reiterated. "And if I told Mr. Hendrie he'd have you all for criminal libel—or worse. Now, see here," he went on, after a dramatic pause, "I tell you plainly—if I ever hear another breath of the like of this yarn going around I'll see that Mr. Hendrie has you all lagged for a pack of libelous rascals who ought to be in penitentiary."

He finished up his angry denunciation by bringing his clenched fist down on the table bell with a force that brought Mr. Sharpe flying into the room on the dead run, and left the shamefaced townsmen glowering upon the flaming face of their unfortunate comrade.

But the sensations of the evening did not end here. Angus furnished them with another, even greater than those which had preceded it.

"Take the orders—again!" he cried, as though hurling a challenge, and daring any one to refuse his hospitality.

And such was the apprehension his manner inspired in the hearts of the gathered scandal-mongers, that all selection was reduced to a general call for whisky, that being the only refreshment their confused brains could think of under such a dreadful strain.

CHAPTER IX

THE WHEAT TRUST

Monica leaned forward in her saddle as her well-trained broncho came to a stand. She set her elbow on her knee, and the oval of her pensive face found a resting place in the palm of her hand. Thus she sat gazing out over the golden world, which rustled and rippled in the lightest of summer zephyrs, chanting its whispered song of prosperity to the delight of her listening ears.

Summer was nearing its height and a perfect day shone

down upon the world. There was no cloud to mar the perfect azure of the sky, or shadow the ripening sun. The lightest of summer breezes scarcely stirred the perfumed air, which she drank in, in deep breaths, her whole being pervaded with the joy of living.

Everywhere about her spread out this rippling sea of golden wheat. Far as the eye could see, in the vague heat haze which hovered over the distant line of nodding grain, it washed the shores of an indefinite horizon, a monument to one man's genius, a testimony to the unflinching determination with which he faced the world and wrested from life all those things his heart was set upon.

A great pride stirred within her. It was a worthy labor; it was magnificent. Was there another man in the world comparable with this great husband of hers? She thought not. His was the brain which had conceived the stupendous scheme; his was the guiding hand which had organized this vast feeding-ground of a hungry world; his was the courage that feared neither failure nor disaster; his was the driving force which carried him on, surmounting every difficulty, or thrusting them ruthlessly from his path.

What other schemes yet lay behind his steady eyes awaiting the moment of decision for their operation? She wondered; and wondering smiled, confident in the knowledge that he had yet worlds to conquer, and that she would share in his victories. It all seemed very, very wonderful to this woman who, all her life, had only known desperate struggles for her bare needs.

Suddenly she sat up and flung her arms wide open, as though in a wild desire to take to her bosom the whole world about her. Then she laughed aloud, a joyous, happy laugh, and set her horse galloping toward her home. She loved it all, every acre of it, every golden ear, every red grain that grew there. She loved it because of—him.

Her delight culminated as she reached the house. As the man-servant stepped forward to assist her to dismount he gave her the only information that could have added to her happiness at such a moment.

"Mr. Hendrie is home, ma'am," he said. "He's in the office, awaiting your return."

Monica sprang to the ground with an exclamation which,

even to the well-trained footman, conveyed something of her feelings, and ran into the house. In a moment, almost, she was in her husband's arms, and returning his caresses.

"I made home sooner than I hoped, Mon," he said, the moment of their greeting over.

The woman's smiling eyes looked up into his face.

"Yes. And I'm so glad. You said not until Thursday next, and this is only Saturday. You were full of a tremendous business in your letter last Tuesday. Something you couldn't trust to paper."

The man smiled, but his powerful features wore that set look which Monica had long ago learned to understand meant the machine-like working of the brain behind it on some matter which occupied his whole attention.

"That's it," he said, in his sparing manner when dealing with affairs. "Trust."

"Trust?" Monica echoed the word, her eyes widening with inquiry.

Hendrie nodded.

"This has been a secret I've kept—even from you," he said. "From the moment you promised to be my wife, why, I just determined to turn all my wheat interests into one huge trust. I determined to organize it, and become its president for a while. After it's good and going—maybe I'll retire from active service and—just hand over the rest of my life to you, and to those things which are, perhaps, more worth doing—than—than, well, growing wheat."

The woman's face was a study in emotion.

"Oh, Alec," she cried. "You—you are doing this for—me?"

"I'm doing this, Mon, because I guess you've taught me something my eyes have been mostly blind to. I'm doing this because I'm learning things I didn't know before. One of them's this. The satisfaction of piling up a fortune has its limit. Maybe I've reached that limit. Anyway I seem to be groping around for something else—something better. Guess I'm not just clear about things yet. But—well, maybe, seeing you've made things look different, you'll help me—sort it out."

While he was speaking Monica had turned away to the window which looked out upon the beautiful stream far

below them. Now she turned, and all her love was shining in her eyes.

"Oh, Alec," she cried earnestly, "I thank God that this is so. With all my heart I thank Him that this wonderful new feeling has come through—me."

After that the man's attitude changed again to the cool, yet forceful method which had made him the financial prince he was. Nor, as she noted the swift changing of his moods, could Monica help remembering that other change she had once witnessed. That moment when on the discovery of Frank's picture in her apartments he had been changed in a flash from the perfect lover to a demon of jealous fury. She felt that she had untold depths to fathom yet, before she could hope to understand the mysteries of this man's soul.

She listened to him now with all her business faculties alert. Once more he was the employer, and she the humble but willing secretary.

"I have practically finished the preliminaries of this trust," he said. "When it's fixed there'll be a bit of a shout. Bound to be. But I don't guess that matters any. What really does matter is the result, and how it's going to affect the public. My principles are sound, and—wholesome. We're not looking for big lumps of profit. We're not out to rob the world of one cent. We are out to protect—the public as well as ourselves. And the protection we both need is against those manipulators of the market like Henry Louth, and other unscrupulous speculators. In time I'm hoping to make the trust world-wide. Meanwhile eighty per cent. of the grain growers of this country, and the northwestern states across the border, are ready to come in. For the rest it's just a question of time before they are forced to. Such will be the supplies of grain from our control in a few years that we can practically collar the market. Then, when the organization is complete, and the wheat growers are universally bonded together, there's going to be no middle man, and the public will pay less for its bread, and the growers will reap greater profits. That's my scheme. I tell you right here no one's a right to come between the producer and the consumer. The man who does so is a vampire, and has no right to exist. He sits in his office and grows fat,

sucking the blood of both the toiler in the field and the toiler in the city. He must go."

Monica clasped her hands in the enthusiasm with which Hendrie always inspired her. She knew he was no dreamer, but a man capable of putting into practice the schemes of his essentially commercial genius.

"Yes, yes!" she cried. "It is immense. I have always known that if only a man with sufficient courage and influence and capital could be found some such scheme might be operated. And you—you have thought of it all the time. It has been your secret. And now——"

"Now? Now I'm going to ask for your contribution." Hendrie smiled. "Ah, Mon, I can't do without you. I am going to set you a task that'll tax all your capacity and devotion to me. You've got to run this great farm of ours. Oh, you haven't got to be a farmer," he said quickly, at sight of the woman's blank look. "You will have the same army of helpers under you that Angus has. It will be for you to see that the work is done. Guess yours will just be the organizing head. I'll need Angus in Winnipeg. He is a man of big capacity for the work I need. You see, I know I can trust him in things that I could trust to no other man."

Hendrie rose from his seat at the writing table, and pressed a bell.

"I'll send for him now," he explained.

Monica came to his side, and laid a shaking hand upon his shoulder. Habit was strong in her. She could not altogether forget that he was no longer her employer. She approached him now in something of the old spirit.

"Could not I do the work in Winnipeg?" she asked timidly. "Would it not be wiser to leave Angus——?"

Hendrie's keen eyes looked straight down into hers.

"We are battling with hard fighting men who demand cent per cent for their money, and can only get a fair interest," he said. "They must be dealt with by men as hard as themselves. No, it's not woman's work. Angus is the hardest man of business I know. I can trust him. Therefore I require him—even in preference to you."

Monica bowed her head. She accepted his verdict in this as in all things.

"Yes," she said simply. "I think I understand." Then she went on in a thrilling voice. "But I am glad there is work for me to do. So glad. Oh, Alec, you are making me a factor in this great affair. You have allotted me my work in an epoch-making financial enterprise, and I—I am very thankful."

Her husband stooped and kissed her. Then he patted her on the shoulder, as he might have done when she was his secretary.

"Good, Mon," he said, in the calm tone of approval Monica knew so well. Then he went back to his seat.

At that moment Angus Moraine appeared in the doorway. His coming was swift and silent, and, for the first time since she had known him, his cold face and colder eyes struck unpleasantly upon the woman who was to supersede him.

Hendrie looked up, and, in one swift glance, noted all that Monica had seen in the manager's face without being in the least affected by it. He knew this man better than it is generally given to one man to know another. He adopted no roundabout methods now.

"I'm going to take this place out of your hands, Angus, my boy," he said easily. "I want you in Winnipeg. I have a big coup on, which I will explain to you later. The essential point is that I want you in Winnipeg. You must be ready in one month's time. The appointment will be to your advantage. Get me?" Then he smiled coolly. "A month will give you time to arrange your various wheat interests about here."

Angus displayed no emotion of any sort. That the change was distasteful to him there could be no doubt. He had expected some such result with Monica's appearance on the scene. Nor did the millionaire's knowledge of his private interests disconcert him. It was not easy to take this man off his guard.

"Yes," he said simply, and left the other to do the talking.

But Hendrie turned again to his desk as though about to write.

"That's all," he said shortly.

Angus made no attempt to retire. Just for one second his eyes shot a swift glance in Monica's direction. She was standing at the window with her back turned.

"Who supersedes me here?" he demanded. There was no warmth in Moraine's somewhat jarring voice. Monica looked round.

Hendrie raised his massive head.

"Eh? Oh—my wife." And he turned to his writing again.

Angus abruptly thrust a hand into his breast pocket and turned deliberately to Monica.

"I met Maybee last night—the postmaster," he said, drawing a letter from his pocket. "He handed me this mail, addressed to the post office, for you, Mrs. Hendrie. He asked me to hand it to you. Guess I forgot it this morning. P'raps it's not important—seeing it was addressed to the post office."

For the life of her, Monica could not control the color of her cheeks, and Angus was quick to note their sudden pallor as he stood with the letter held out toward her.

She took it from him with a hand that was unsteady. Neither did this escape the cold eyes of the man.

Monica knew from whom the letter came. She knew without even glancing at the handwriting. Why had Frank written? She had seen him two evenings ago, and settled everything. She was terrified lest her husband should question her.

"Did he do right—sending it up?" There was a subtle irony in the Scot's cold words that did not escape the ears of the millionaire. He looked round.

Without looking in her husband's direction Monica became aware of his interest. With a great effort she pulled herself together.

"Quite right, Mr. Moraine," she said steadily, now smiling in her most gracious manner. "And thank you very much for taking such trouble. It has saved me a journey."

Angus abruptly withdrew. Nor was he quite sure whether he had achieved his purpose. As he passed out of the house his doubt was still in his eyes. Nor, to judge by his general expression, was that purpose a kindly one.

The moment the door closed behind Angus, Hendrie swung round in his chair.

"Letters addressed to the post office? Why?" His steady eyes looked up into his wife's face with an intentness that

suddenly reminded her of the dreadful display of jealousy she had witnessed once before.

It was a desperate moment. It was one of those moments when it would have been far better to forget all else, and remember only her love for her husband, and trust to that alone. It was a moment when in a flash she saw the deadly side of the innocent deception she was practicing. It was a moment when her soul cried out to her that she was definitely, criminally wrong in the course she had marked out for herself. And, in that moment, two roads distinctly opened up before her mind's eye. One was narrow and threatening; the other, well, it looked the broader and easier of the two, and she plunged headlong down it.

She smiled back into his face. She held up the letter and waved it at him. She was acting. She bitterly knew she was acting.

"Ah," she cried, with a gayety she forced herself to. "You must have your big secrets from me, I must have my little ones from you. That's only fair."

Hendrie smiled, but without warmth.

"Why, it's fair enough, but—I told you my secret."

Monica's laugh rippled pleasantly in his ears.

"So you did. I'd forgotten that." Then she gave an exaggerated sigh. "Then I s'pose I must tell you mine. And I did so want to surprise you with it. You have always told me that I am a—clever business woman, haven't you?"

Hendrie nodded.

"Sure," he said, his manner relaxing.

"You settled one hundred thousand dollars on me when we were married—all to myself, 'to squander as quickly as you like.' Those were your words. Well, I just wanted to show you that I am not one to squander money. I am investing some of it in a concern that is to show a handsome profit. The letter is from the man who is to handle the matter for me. Oh, dear, you've robbed me of all my fun. It is a shame. I—I'm disappointed."

Hendrie rose, smiling. The reaction from his moment of suspicion was intensely marked. He came over to her.

"May I see it?" he asked.

Monica risked all on her one final card.

"Oh, don't rob me of the last little bit of my secret," she

cried. Then she promptly held the letter out. "Why, of course you can read it—if you want to."

She waited almost breathlessly for the verdict. If the suspense were prolonged she felt that she must collapse. A dreadful faintness was stealing over her, a faintness she was powerless to fight against. But the suspense was not prolonged, and the verdict came to her ears as though from afar off.

"Keep your little secret, Mon," she heard her husband say. "It's good to give surprises—when they're pleasant. Forgive me worrying you, but—but I think my love for you is a sort of madness—I——" She felt his great arms suddenly thrust about her and was thankful for their support.

CHAPTER X

MONICA'S FALSE STEP

Alexander Hendrie spent only two short days at the farm before he was called away on a flying visit to the seat of his operations at Winnipeg. But during those two days there was no rest for him; his business pursued him through mail and over wire, and the jarring note of the telephone became anathema to the entire household at Deep Willows.

The announcement of his going came as no surprise to Monica. She was prepared for anything in that way. She knew that in the days to come she was likely to see less and less of her husband, the penalty of her marriage to a man engaged in such monumental financial undertakings as his She was careful to offer no protest; she even avoided expressing the genuine regret she felt. It was the best way she could serve him, she felt, forgetful of the possibility of her attitude being otherwise interpreted. To her, any such display could only be a hindrance, a deterrent to him, and, as such, would be unfair, would not be worthy of her as a helper in his great schemes.

From the moment she learned that she was to take charge of the farm at Deep Willows she began to prepare herself; and with her husband's going, she was left even freer still to pursue the knowledge she had yet to acquire for her new

responsibility. Her time was spent almost wholly out of doors; and such was her enthusiasm that daylight was none too early to find her in the saddle, riding round the remoter limits of the farm, watching and studying every detail of the work which was so soon to become her charge.

That she reveled in the new life opening out before her there could be little doubt. Her rounded cheeks and serious eyes, the perfect balance of her keen mind and healthfulness of body all bore testimony to its beneficial effects upon a nature eager to come to grips with the world's work.

She had quite shaken off the effect of that moment of panic when the preservation of her innocent secret had hovered in the balance. Well enough she knew how desperately all this happy life of hers had been jeopardized by the coming of Frank's letter through the hands of Angus Moraine. Had her husband only taken her at her word, opened it and read the heading, "Dearest mother"—well, he hadn't. And she thanked her God for the inspiration of the moment that had prompted her to offer him the letter to read, and for the power and restraint which had been vouchsafed her to weather the threatening storm of almost insane jealousy she had witnessed growing in her passionate husband's eyes.

But it had served her as a lesson, and she was determined to take no further risks. It was absolutely necessary to see Frank once more to hand him the purchase money for the farm, and his starting capital. She dared not risk the mail, and to pay him by check would be to court prompt disaster. Yes, she must see him that once more, and, after that, though it might wrench her feelings to the limit, Frank must pursue his career with only her distant eye watching over him.

So her mind was made up, swiftly, calmly, after a careful study of the position. She arrived at her decision through no selfishness. Rather was it the reverse. She was sacrificing herself to her husband and her boy. To do otherwise was to risk wrecking her husband's happiness as well as her own, and to start Frank in life with Alexander Hendrie as a possible enemy would be far too severe a handicap.

Now, as she rode round the western limits of the grainlands she was occupied with thoughts of the Trust, nor could

her devoted woman's mind fail to dwell more upon the man than his work.

He had told her that his new aspect of life had been inspired by her, and the memory of his words still thrilled her. That she was his influence for good filled her with a great and happy contentment. She felt that to be such to the man she loved was in itself worth living for. But he had plainly shown her how much more she could be to him than that. Could any woman ask more than to be a partner in the works his genius conceived? No; and in this thought lay the priceless jewel adorning her crown of womanhood.

She was watching a number of teams and their drivers moving out to a distant hay slough. Forty teams of finely bred Shire horses moving out from the farm with stately gait, each driver sitting astride of his nearside horse's comfortable back. She knew the mowers were already in the slough, where haying had been going on for days. It was a fine string of horses, but it was the merest detail of the stud which was kept up to carry on the work of the farm. And beside all this horse power there were the steam plows, reapers and binders, threshers. The wonders of the organization were almost inexhaustible.

The horses passed her by and vanished into a dip in the rolling plains. Their long day had begun, but unlike Monica, they possessed no other incentive than to demonstrate the necessity of their existence.

As yet the sun had only just cleared the horizon, and the chill of the morning air had not tempered towards the heat of the coming day. Monica felt the chill, and, as soon as the horses had passed her, she lifted her reins to continue her round.

At that moment she became aware of a horseman riding at a gallop from the direction of the farm, and, furthermore, she recognized him at once as Angus Moraine, evidently about to visit the scene of the haying.

She waited for him to come up, and greeted him pleasantly, in spite of the fact that, since the incident of the letter, her feelings toward him had undergone serious revision.

"Good morning, Mr. Moraine," she cried, as the man reined his horse in. "They're out promptly," she added, following the trail of the haying gang with her eyes.

Angus looked after them, too, and his thin lips twisted wryly.

"They need to be," he declared coldly. "There's one time for farm work to start, Mrs. Hendrie—that's daylight."

"Yes. I suppose there's no deviation from that rule."

"None. And we pay off instantly any one who thinks differently."

"There's no excuse?"

Angus shook his head.

"None whatever. If a man's ill we lay him off—until he's better. But they never are ill. They haven't time."

Monica surveyed the Scot with interest. Her husband's opinion of him carried good weight.

"You run this place with a somewhat steely rule," she said. "These men are so many machines, the horses, too. Each has to produce so much work. The work you set for them."

Angus's eyes were turned reflectively upon the horizon.

"You're thinking I'm a hard man to work for," he said. "Maybe I am." He glanced back at the miles of wheat, and Monica thought she detected something almost soft in the expression of his eyes. "Yes," he went on, "they're machines of sorts. But the work any man on this farm has to do is work I can do—have done, both in quantity and kind. As for the horses, I'm thinking of building a smaller sick barn. The one we've got is a waste of valuable room, it's so rarely used." He shook his head. "There's just one way to run a big farm, Mrs. Hendrie. It's the hardest work I know, and the boss has got to work just as hard as the least paid 'choreman.'"

"I think—I feel that," Monica agreed cordially. "The work must be done in season. And it's man's work."

Angus calmed his restive horse.

"You're right, mam," he exclaimed, with almost unnecessary eagerness. "It is man's work—not woman's." He looked her straight in the eyes, and Monica accepted the challenge.

"You mean I am not the fit person to step into your shoes," she said, with a smile.

Her smile in no way disconcerted the other. He returned her look, while his hard mouth twisted in its wry fashion.

"P'raps I was thinking that; p'raps I was thinking of something else. I'll not say you can't run this show. But I'll say a woman oughtn't to."

"And why not?"

Monica's demand came sharply, but even while she made it she realized the man's hard, muscular figure as he sat there in his saddle, with his thin shirt open at his bronzed neck, and the cords of muscle standing out on his spare, bare arms. She understood her own bodily weakness compared to his strength, and acknowledged to herself the justice of his assertion.

"Do you need to ask, mam?" Angus retorted, with just a suspicion of contempt. "Could you handle these guys when they get on the buck? Could you talk to 'em? Could you talk to 'em the way they understand?"

Monica's eyes flashed.

"I think so."

"Then you're thinking ten times wrong, mam," came the manager's prompt and emphatic retort. "You'll have hell all around you in a day."

Moraine's manner was becoming more aggressive, and Monica was losing patience.

"You're not encouraging, but you're quite wrong. I can assure you I can run this farm with just as stern a discipline as you. Perhaps you have yet to learn that a woman's discipline can be far harsher, if need be, than any man's. Evidently you have not had much to do with women. Believe me, my sex are by no means the angels some people would have you believe."

"No."

The man's negative came in such a peculiar, almost insolent tone that Monica was startled. She looked at him, and, as she did so, beheld an unpleasantly ironical light in his cold eyes. She interpreted this attitude in her own way.

"You seem to feel leaving your control here," she said sharply.

The man's expression underwent a prompt change. He was her husband's employee once more. The insolent irony had utterly vanished out of his eyes.

"I do, mam," he said earnestly. "I feel it a heap—and

it makes me feel bad. That's—that's why I've told you —all this."

Monica's resentment died out before the man's earnestness.

"I don't think I understand you," she said more gently.

"I didn't guess you would." The Scot leaned forward in his saddle, and his face lit with something like appeal. "You see, mam, you haven't taken a patch of prairie land and turned it into the greatest single-handed grain-growing proposition in the world. You haven't worked years and years fighting men and elements, and beaten 'em, until you can sit back and reckon your yearly crop to almost the fraction of a bushel. And if you haven't done these things —why, 'tisn't likely you're going to undrestand how I feel.

"I've thought a whole lot since your husband told me he was going to take me off this farm; and I made up my mind to talk to you. You see, it's no use talking to Hendrie." The man laughed. "Hendrie? Why, you reckon I'm a hard man, but I tell you when Hendrie's mind is made up on anything he's harder than any rock or metal ever found above or below this earth. I saw you go out this morning, and I guessed you'd be along to see those teams get to work, so when I was through, back at the office, I came along quick to have this yarn with you."

"But to what end?" inquired Monica. His earnestness and evident hatred of leaving the farm had told her all she required. But she wanted to bring him quickly to his point.

"To what end?" he echoed. "Why, to ask you to persuade your husband to leave me here. Oh, I'm not going to buck," he went on, at sight of Monica's coldly raised brows. "What Hendrie says goes with me—always. He's made me what I am, and I've never known him to make a mistake when he's promised me benefit. I like him, and so what he says goes with me—always. But I tell you frankly I hate giving up this farm *I've* built. Yes, I've built it—not Hendrie. It's been his money—his scheme. But it's been my work, and I—I just love it. That's all, mam; at least that's all except, if you fancy doing it, you can persuade Hendrie to leave me here."

Monica shook her head decidedly; and, after a thoughtful pause, her answer came quite coldly.

"No," she said, with decision. "I can do nothing in the matter."

In a moment cold anger lit Moraine's eyes.

"You won't—you mean."

Instantly Monica was stirred to a resentment as cold as his own. But she held herself well in hand.

"How dare you say that to me? I tell you I can do nothing. But, since you put it that way, I certainly will do nothing. You acknowledge your loyalty to my husband one minute, and seek to turn him from his well-considered purpose the next. I certainly will not be party to such poor service. Prove the loyalty you boast by accepting his orders without demur, and, if I know anything of him, you are not likely to suffer by so doing."

Angus displayed nothing of the penitent under Monica's rebuke. His angry eyes looked straight into hers, and his reply rapped out smartly—

"If you always serve Alexander Hendrie as loyally as I have served him, and shall continue to serve him, you'll have little enough on your conscience. Maybe I was foolish to come to you at all. Anyway, I'm never likely to do so again. And I'll just ask you always to remember I did come to you and asked a simple favor, which carried with it no disloyalty to your husband. I want you to remember that, and to remember you refused me—for no sound reason."

He lifted his reins, and, crushing both heels into the flanks of his raw-boned broncho, galloped off without waiting for a reply.

Monica looked after him; and, somehow, as her thoughtful eyes followed him out of sight, his challenge still rang in her ears; just his challenge, that was all. His veiled, final threat had left her wholly unnerved.

"If you always serve Alexander Hendrie as loyally as I have served him, and shall continue to serve him, you'll have little enough on your conscience."

Whatever had been his purpose the words were not without effect upon her. They left her feeling uncomfortable, they left her nervous and irritable, and she felt that her dislike for this man was little less than his evident dislike for her.

CHAPTER XI

WHICH DEALS WITH A CHANCE MEETING

Monica was more disconcerted than she knew, and finally set her horse at a gallop across country, regardless of whither her course might take her. Nor did she pause to consider her whereabouts until the wheat lands were left several miles behind her, and she found herself entering the woods which lined the deep cutting of a remote prairie creek. Here she drew rein and glanced about her for guidance.

She looked back the way she had come, but the wheat fields were lost behind a gently undulating horizon of grass. Ahead of her, far as the eye could see, the wide-mouthed cutting of the creek stretched away toward a ridge of purple hills. To the right of her was the waving grass of the prairie, miles and miles of it, without the tiniest object on it to break the green monotony.

She gazed out over the latter with mildly appreciative eyes. Her ride had done her good. Something of the effect of Angus upon her had worn off. She almost sympathized with him as she dwelt upon the reason of his rudeness to her.

Presently she turned about. Her breakfastless condition was making itself felt, and, anyway, she had wasted enough time. She would return home and breakfast, and, after that, with a fresh horse, she would continue her round of the farm.

She was about to put her purpose into operation when the sound of wheels coming up from the creek below drew her attention. At the same instant her horse pricked its ears and neighed. A responsive neigh echoed the creature's greeting, and, the next moment, a single-horse buckboard appeared over the shoulder of the cutting.

Instead of moving on, Monica was held fascinated by the apparition. The spectacle of this solitary traveler was too interesting to be left uninvestigated; and she smiled as she gazed upon the girlish occupant of the vehicle. The stranger's face was shadowed under a linen sunbonnet, and her trim figure was clad in the simplest of dark skirts and white shirt-waist. She was urging her heavy horse with words

of encouragement, alternated by caressingly emitted chirrups from a pair of as pretty lips as Monica remembered ever to have seen.

"Good morning," Monica cried cordially, as the vehicle drew near. She sat smilingly waiting for the lifting of the sunbonnet, that she might obtain a glimpse of the face she felt sure was pretty beneath it.

The girl looked up with a start.

"My!" she cried. Then she remembered. "Good morning—mam!"

The final suggestion of respect came as the speaker realized the perfect-fitting riding habit Monica was wearing. Her eyes were round with wonder, but there was no shyness in them. Equally there was no rudeness. Just frank, pleased astonishment.

"I'm afraid I startled you," Monica said kindly, as the girl drew up her horse. "You were so very busy coaxing your horse."

The stranger smiled in response.

"He needs coaxing," she said. "The pore feller's pretty old, and we've surely come some way."

"Not this morning," Monica protested, studying the girl's face with genuine admiration.

She was not disappointed. The girl was a striking-looking creature. Her dark hair and brows threw up into strong relief the beautiful eyes which looked fearlessly up into her face as she made her reply.

"Oh yes, mam," she said calmly. "You see, we started from Toogoods' at four o'clock. I want to be home by noon. Guess we'll make it tho'. Old Pete and I have made some long journeys together."

"He looks a good horse," Monica hazarded. She knew little enough of horse flesh, but she liked the look of this girl and wanted to be agreeable. "How far have you to go now?"

"Guess it's most twenty-two or thereabouts. Mamma'll be worried some if I don't make home by noon. I don't like worrying mamma, she's so good, and—and she's dreadfully nervous."

"An invalid?" suggested Monica.

"Oh, no." The girl's eyes were still absorbed in the de-

tails of Monica's dress. She had never seen anything quite like it before, and her shrewd mind was speculating as to this stranger's identity.

"Say, where you from?" she asked suddenly, in a quick, decided manner. "Guess you belong to Deep Willows. Maybe you're Mrs. Hendrie?"

"Quite right—how did you know?"

The girl reddened slightly as she smiled.

"Why—your clothes. You see, we've all heard you're at Deep Willows."

Monica laughed, and the girl joined in.

"My clothes—folks don't wear riding habits much about here, I s'pose?"

"No, mam."

Monica nodded.

"Now, I may ask who you are. I didn't like to before, but——"

The girl smiled frankly.

"You guessed it would be rude," she said quickly, "so you let me be rude—instead."

Monica laughed a denial.

"Oh no," she said. "I just didn't think about it."

"But it doesn't matter, mam," the girl went on. "Nothing's rude that isn't meant rude. I never mean to be rude. I don't like rudeness. I'm Phyllis Raysun, mam. We're farmers—mamma an' me. Just a bit of a farm, if you can call it 'farm'—not like Deep Willows."

The girl's unmistakable awe when she spoke of Deep Willows amused Monica.

But now she scrutinized her with an added and more serious interest. So this was the Phyllis who had caught her boy's fancy. This was the girl he described as "bully" —and she was frankly in agreement with him. She longed there and then to speak of Frank and learn something of Phyllis' feelings toward him, but she knew she must deny herself.

"I dare say it's a very happy little place for all that, Phyllis," she said, deliberately using the girl's first name. She meant to begin the intimacy she had suddenly determined to establish at once. "Who works it for you? Your father—brother?"

As she watched the changing expression of the girl's face Monica thought her the prettiest creature she had seen for years.

"Neither, mam." There was a slight hesitation over the use of the respectful "mam." Monica's use of her own name had slightly embarrassed her. "There's just mamma and me, and we work it together. We've got a choreman, but that's all. It's—it's only a quarter section."

"You two never do all the work yourselves—plowing?" Monica cried incredulously.

The girl nodded. She liked this stranger. She was so handsome, so good.

"Mamma an' me—mam."

Monica's eyes grew very soft. It seemed wonderful to her this courage in two lonely women.

Suddenly she leaned forward in her saddle, and spoke very gently.

"Would you like to oblige me—very much?" She smiled into the girl's earnest face.

Phyllis flushed with pleasure.

"Why, surely—mam."

"Then don't call me 'mam,'" Monica said, in a tone calculated to leave the girl with no feeling of shame at her respectful attitude. Then she laughed in the way Phyllis liked to hear. "You see, I am just the same as you, Phyllis—if I do wear a tailored riding habit. We're both farmers—in our way."

Phyllis blushed, but shook her head with a simple yet definite decision.

"I won't call you 'mam' if you don't like it," she said readily. "But I can't help thinking there's a big—big difference, if you don't mind me speaking so plainly."

Monica's interest was sincere.

"Go on, child," she said. "I like to hear you talk. It—it reminds me of some one I'm—interested in."

The girl's luminous eyes brightened.

"I wasn't going to say much—only——" she hesitated doubtfully, "only I hear so many folk say there's no difference. Most of them say it sort of spitefully, and you can see they don't say it because—because they really believe it. They sort of want to make out they're as good as any-

body else, and all the time most of 'em can't even think right. It's just conceit, and spite, and envy. And, oh, there's such a big difference all the time. Take two men. Take our choreman, and your—your husband. Our man can plow a furrow—but not so straight and true as I can. I'd say he can clean a barn out right. Maybe he could drive a team down a straight trail without hurting anything. But that's all he can do. Say, he hasn't got brains enough to wash himself wholesome and clean. Then look at Mr. Hendrie. Was there ever such a great man? He doesn't sit down and shout he's better than other folk. Maybe he don't think he is. But he gets right up and does things that come near making the world stare. And it's done out of his own head. He thinks, and—and does. And if other folks were as good as him they'd be doing just the same, and there'd be nothing to wonder at in—in anybody. I wouldn't be rude to you—indeed I wouldn't, but—but there's a heap of difference between folk, it shows in the result of their lives."

Monica was startled. She was filled with an intense wonder at this youthful, humble prairie flower. Where did she get such thoughts, such ideas from at her age?

She answered her very carefully. She felt that it was necessary—it was imperative. Somehow she felt that this child's brain, albeit immature, was perhaps superior to her own.

"Well, Phyllis," she said, "there's a great deal in what you say, but perhaps we are looking at things from different points of view. I was thinking of the moral aspect. I maintain a good woman's a good woman, whatever her station. No clothes, no education can alter that. Every good man or good woman is entitled to the same consideration, whatever the condition of—of their lives."

Phyllis watched her new friend eagerly while she spoke. She drank in her words, and sorted them out in her own quaint fashion. The moment she ceased speaking she was ready with her answer.

"Sometimes I think I'd like to see it that way," she said, with simple candor. "Then sometimes, most generally, I think I wouldn't. To me that sort of makes the good God kind of helpless. And He isn't. Not really. You've just

got to look around and see what He's done to understand that. Look at the trees, the prairie, the hills, the water. See how He's provided everything for us all. Well, the way you think makes out that He's just created us and all this. He's made us all in the same pattern, and dumped us right down here just for amusement, and sort of said: 'There you are; I've done my best; just get right to it and see how you can make out.' Well, when I look around and see all He's done I kind o' feel we're all working out just as He wants us to. We're not so much His children as we're His servants, and like all servants we've got our places, some high, some low. And according to our places we ought to say 'sir' and 'mam' to those above us, just as we feel all of us ought to say it to Him. Guess maybe I can't make it all clear—maybe you'll think me a sort of fool child, but if I live to be a hundred I'll feel I want to say 'mam' to you, and 'sir' to Mr. Hendrie. And that's because any one must see I'm not your equal, and never will be."

Monica was left with no answer. She might have answered, but she was afraid to. She was afraid that any further contradiction of such obviously wholesome ideas might affect this simple nature adversely. Therefore she permitted herself only to marvel.

"Who do you talk to about—these things," she asked after a brief pause.

Phyllis flushed. She was afraid she had offended where she had meant no offense. Monica's tone had been almost cold.

"I don't generally talk so much," she said hastily. "I like to think most—when I'm plowing, or working on the farm. I talk to my beau sometimes," she added, with a blush.

"You have a beau," said Monica, with a ready smile. "But of course you must have—with your pretty face."

"Oh, yes, and we're going to get married soon," Phyllis hurried on, basking once more in the other's smile. "His mamma's going to buy him a swell farm and start him right, and we're going to get married. Frank's awfully kind. He's —he's——"

"Frank? Frank—who?" Monica had no need of the information, but she was anxious to encourage the girl.

"Frank Burton. He's much bigger than me, and he thinks a heap. I just love him. I just love him so I don't know what I'd do if I hadn't got him. He's only a boy. We're the same age, and he's got the loveliest face."

"And when is he going to get this farm?"

"Soon. Quite soon. Then we'll be married. It's—it's good to love some one and feel they love you," Phyllis went on, almost abstractedly. It makes you feel that you can work ever so. The days get short, and the nights shorter still. It makes the air all full of things that make you want to laugh, and sing, and be good to everything—even to spiders and—and bugs and things. Yes, it sets everything moving quick about you, and all the time it's just you, because you're full of happiness and looking forward. The only thing that's slow is the time between seeing him."

Monica smiled, and Phyllis laughed happily.

The mistress of Deep Willows could have sat on indefinitely talking and laughing with this frank, ingenious child, but she knew that, however reluctantly, she must tear herself away. Already the sun was high in the sky, and Phyllis had to reach home by noon, while she had her round to complete. So she lifted her reins, and her dozing broncho threw up its head alertly.

"I think you'll be very happy with your beau, Phyllis," she said, gently. "You would make any man happy. If this Frank Burton is all you say he is, and I'm sure he is, I fancy you'll live to see the day when you have quite lost your desire to say 'mam'—when you speak to me.

The girl shook her head seriously.

"I hope not."

Monica's smile was at thoughts which were quite impossible for the other to read.

"I hope that day will come," she said. "So there we must agree to think differently. Meanwhile, may I come and see you, and will you come and see me?" Her eyes grew almost pathetically appealing. "Will you?" she urged.

A flush of embarrassment swept over the girl's happy face. In a moment she was struggling to express her gratitude.

"Oh, ma—Mrs. Hendrie," she cried. "Me come to Deep Willows? I—I—oh, it would be too much."

"Will you?"

Monica had set her heart on obtaining this girl's promise.

"Oh—yes—if—if——"

"There must be no 'ifs,'" Monica cried. Then she urged her horse nearer the buckboard and held out her hand.

"Good-bye, Phyllis," she said, lingering over the girl's name caressingly. "I shall keep you to your word. And I shall come to see you. Good-bye, my dear," she cried again. "A pleasant journey."

The girl pressed the neatly gloved hand her new friend held out to her, and her old horse, after its welcome rest, started off with added briskness. She was loath enough to go, but she had yet many miles to travel before noon. She called out a warm good-bye, and waved her small brown hand.

"I surely will come," she cried, "I'll never—never forget."

Monica watched them go till the rattling old buckboard dropped behind one of the rising prairie rollers. Then, with a deep sigh, she set off toward her home.

CHAPTER XII

THE CLEAN SLATE

Monica's chance meeting with Phyllis Raysun was not without its effect on both their lives. An effect both marked and immediate in each case. The girl drove on home in a state of considerable elation, and told her story of the "great lady" to her sympathetic, if not very clever mother, Pleasant Raysun. She told it not as one might speak of a passing incident on her journey, but as an important factor in her uneventful life.

"Mamma," she said, after a thoughtful pause, the story having come to its commonplace ending, "it likely don't sound great to you; maybe you'll forget about it, or, if you don't, you'll say I'm just a sentimental girl whose feelings get clear away with her. And maybe I am, maybe you're right; but I don't think so. She's a lovely, lovely woman, and somehow I kind of feel I'm all mixed up with her already. I don't think folks *make* friends. Friends are just friends. They are, or they aren't. Even if you don't

know them, they are your friends, waiting till the time comes when you meet. That's how I feel about Mrs. Hendrie. I—I'm sure we're friends, and always have been."

Pleasant Raysun was a plump body, whose dark eyes and soft mouth were strangely opposed in their efforts to display the character behind. She was just a gentle, soft creature, quite devoid of any attainments beyond a capacity for physical work, and an adoring affection for the daughter to whom she looked for guidance.

"Maybe you're right, my dear," she said amiably, "you generally are. How you know things beats me all to death. Whoever would 'a' guessed Pop Toogood was sick all this way off like you did? I'm sure I wouldn't. An' then about buyin' a new plow an' binder by instalments. Who'd 'a' thought o' that? It surely must be instinc', as you often say, only wher' you get it beats me. I never had instinc'. Nor did your pop. Leastways he never showed it me. Sometimes I sort o' know when the coffee's just right—maybe that's instinc'—which reminds me the hash must be nigh overbaked."

She rose from her rocker and toddled across to the cook-stove, leaving her daughter to her reflections. She had no power of entering into any of the girl's thoughts and feelings. Her love for her offspring extended to an unreasoning admiration for her capacity and beauty, the only practical expression of which was a simple, loving care for her creature comforts.

With Monica the effect of that meeting on the trail was marked in a wholly different manner. She had at last seen this girl whom her boy had told her of in such glowing terms. She had seen, and she knew that she approved his choice. As she listened to her talk, as she became aware of her views upon matters on which she believed so few girls of her age ever thought seriously, she became more and more convinced that her boy had blindly stumbled upon the one girl to be his helpmeet in the upward career they had marked out for him.

Thus she spent the rest of her day with an added light shining in upon Frank's future, and with it came a swift decision to act promptly, and carry out her carefully considered plans without any further delay. She felt it to be

best from every point of view. It would be best for Frank, since it would leave him free to begin his real business of life at the moment he selected; it would be best for her, since she would then be free to enter upon her control of the farm with a slate wiped perfectly clean of the last shadow of the past which marred its surface.

So she sent word to Angus that she required the best team of drivers and a buggy, since Hendrie's automobile was away, to take her in to Calford the next day.

Her order was received without enthusiasm, but with considerable suspicion by her husband's manager. So much so that the company at the Russell Hotel that night were treated to a more than usual morose severity on the part of this local magnate. He wrapped himself in an impenetrable and sour silence, out of which the most ardent devotion to his favorite spirit could not rouse him.

Monica spent her last hours before retiring to bed in writing a long letter to Frank. She chose the library, or office, as her husband preferred to call it, for her correspondence. She preferred this room to any other in the house. Perhaps it was the effect of her long years spent in a business career. Perhaps it was because it was so soon to become the seat of her administration. Perhaps, again, it was the thoughts of the man who had designed it for his own accommodation that inspired her liking.

It was a luxurious place, and the great desk in the center of it was always a subtle invitation to her. The subdued light focusing down upon the clean white blotting pad, with its delicately chased silver corners, never failed to please her whenever she entered the room at night. Just now she felt more satisfaction than ever as she contemplated ridding herself of this last shadow which marred her happy outlook.

Her maid had insisted on changing her from her habit, which Monica warmly regarded as her business dress, to a semi-evening toilet of costly simplicity. This was a feature of her new life which Monica found it difficult to appreciate. She had looked after herself for so long that she rather feared the serious eyes and deliberate devotion to the conventions of the well-trained Margaret. There was one service that she could not induce herself to submit to. It was that of being prepared for her nightly repose. On this point

the mistress of Deep Willows was adamant, and Margaret was unwillingly forced to give way.

Now she took her seat at the desk. She drew a sheet of notepaper from the stationery cabinet, and, for some moments, sat gazing at it, lost in pleasant thoughts of the young girl she had met that morning.

It was curious what a sudden and powerful hold this child of eighteen had taken upon her affections. She thought she had never encountered any one of her own sex who so pleased her, and she sat there idly dreaming of the days to come, when this boy and girl would marry, and she could subtly, almost unnoticed, draw them into her life.

Yes, it could be done; it could be done through Phyllis. Frank was far too loyal ever, by word or deed, to jeopardize her in her husband's regard. Everything was simplifying itself remarkably. Fortune was certainly with her. She smiled as she thought how they would come to her. A local farmer and his wife, in whom she was interested. Her husband would be rather pleased. He would undoubtedly encourage her in her whim. Then, if he should recognize Frank as the original of the photograph he had once torn up, that would be easily explained and would be an added reason for befriending the couple—seeing that Frank would then be married. Oh, yes, a little tact, a little care, and she would have a daughter as well as a son.

Then she would eventually get Alexander interested in the boy. And when that was achieved she would begin to develop her plans. Frank might be taken into some of her husband's schemes, after which it would be easy stepping upwards toward that fortune she had designed for him.

But she was suddenly awakened to her waste of time, and her own physical tiredness, by the chiming of the little clock in front of her, which was accusingly pointing the hour of ten. It reminded her, too, of the early morning start she must make in the morrow, so she snatched at a pen to begin her letter.

Habit was strong with Monica. An ivory penholder and gilt nib had no charms for her, so the humble vulcanite of the stylograph of her stenography days was selected, and she prepared to write.

But for once her humble friend refused adequate service.

It labored thickly through the heading, "My dearest Frank," and, in attempting to punctuate, a sudden flow of ink left a huge blot in place of the customary comma. With a regretful expostulation Monica turned the paper over and blotted it on the pad, and, after readjusting the pen, went on with her writing, detailing her instructions swiftly but clearly, so that no mistake could be possible.

In less than half an hour the letter was finished and ready for dispatch. So she hurried away to bed, deciding to mail it in Calford when she arrived there next day.

That night Angus returned to the farm about half-past eleven o'clock. There was nobody up to receive him, except the man to take his horse. Nor was his mood improved by the realization that since Mrs. Hendrie's coming he had been definitely robbed of his high estate. He knew he was no longer the master of Deep Willows. In the eyes of the staff of servants, brought from the East, he was one like themselves, a mere employee. The thought galled him, but he was not the man to publicly display his chagrin.

He let himself into his quarters which were situated in an extreme wing of the building, lit the lamp in his office, and flung himself into a chair. He sat there staring moodily before him, chewing the cud of grievance which was momentarily getting a stronger and stronger hold upon him.

He was not the man to submit easily, nor was he likely to display any recklessness in dealing with the situation. His nature was a complex affair, which combined many admirable qualities oddly mixed up with a disposition as sour and spleenful, even revengeful, as well could be. His grievance now was not against Hendrie; there was a peculiar quality of loyalty in him which always left Hendrie far above any blame that he might feel toward others. It was the woman he was thinking of. The woman who had usurped his place; and all the craft of his shrewd mind was directed toward her undoing.

Just now he was speculating as to her reason for suddenly taking the long journey into Calford. He was considering that, and, in conjunction with it, he was thinking of a telegram which Maybee had handed him. It was addressed to Monica, and the postmaster had assured him it was from

Hendrie, announcing his unexpected ability to return home to-morrow. At first Angus had felt spitefully pleased that Hendrie would meet his wife on the trail, but this hope had been dashed by Maybee's subsequent information that the telegram had been dispatched from a place called Gleber, which he knew lay thirty odd miles to the northwest of Everton, and in an almost opposite direction to Calford. Now he was considering, while apparently doing his best to deliver the message, how best he could arrange that Monica should not see it before she went away.

His reason was not quite clear. Only he felt, in the light of what he knew of Monica's clandestine meetings with Mr. Frank Smith, that she was not taking this journey with her husband's knowledge. More than that, he felt that she had no particular desire to advertise it, and that when Hendrie discovered his wife's absence explanations would have to be forthcoming.

Angus was a great believer in his own instinct. What he believed to be intuition had served him well on more than one occasion, and just now he felt that his peculiar faculties in this direction were particularly alert.

After some minutes of deep thought he rose from his chair with a wry smile twisting the corners of his hard mouth. A thought had come to him which might serve.

He made his way to the library and lit the lamp over the desk, and as he did so he sniffed vigorously at the air. He detected perfume, and glanced quickly around him. Then his eyes fell on the blotting-pad where he was about to place the telegram.

In a moment he saw that the pad had been recently used, and the perfume told him by whom. He had no scruples whatever. Monica had been writing letters, and he wondered. He picked up the pad and carefully removed the uppermost sheet of blotting paper. Reversing it, he held it before the light, and studied it carefully. Then he replaced it, but, in doing so, deliberately left the reverse side uppermost.

"Guess you ought to know better, my lady," he muttered, his face genuinely smiling. "Thick pens are cursed things for telling tales on a blotting-sheet."

He carefully placed the telegrapm exactly over the blotted words "My dearest Frank," which now read as they had

been written by his unsuspecting victim. Then he forthwith hurried back to his quarters, feeling in a better frame of mind than he had felt all day.

CHAPTER XIII

HENDRIE'S RETURN

ANGUS MORAINE'S little plan worked out exactly as he had anticipated. Monica did not visit the library before her somewhat rushed departure the following morning. Her preparations had been completed overnight, and there was nothing left which required a visit to the room where the telegram had been deposited.

Her departure took place shortly after daylight, at which hour even the chance visit of a servant to the library was not likely to occur. Thus it happened that the envelope and its contents remained in their place quite unheeded, even by the girl whose duty it was to dust and set the room in order, until two o'clock in the afternoon, at which hour Alexander Hendrie returned.

The millionaire's return was the result of an impulse, inspired by finding himself with something in the nature of a "loose end." His business of the great trust had unexpectedly taken him to meet a deputation of local grain-growers at Gleber, just as he was about to leave Calford for Winnipeg. From thence a flying visit to Deep Willows was only a deviation of route whereby he might fill in spare hours which, otherwise, he would have had to spend waiting for the east-bound mail in Calford.

The idea of surprising Monica had pleased him. He knew the delight it would give her, and, for himself, every moment spent away from her was more than begrudged. Absorbed as Hendrie was in his maelstrom of affairs, it was curious how the human side of the man had developed since his first meeting with Monica. He was still the colossal money-making machine, but it was no longer his whole being as hitherto it had been. There could be no doubt that Monica was now foremost in his thoughts, and he loved with all the strength of his maturity as jealously as any schoolboy.

Consequently, on his arrival at Deep Willows, his disappointment was of the keenest when he learned that Monica had, only that morning, departed suddenly for Calford. However, he was not the man to give way to such feelings for long, especially with means of alleviating them to his hand. His decision was prompt. There was only one thing to do. He would go straight on and join her in Calford, just as soon as sufficient petrol could be put on board the car. With this resolve most of his disappointment evaporated, and he passed on to the library, while a man was despatched to notify Angus of his return.

Angus was on hand. He had arranged that this should be so. He had no intention of missing his cues in the little drama his own mischief had inspired. He meant to be an actor in it, though possibly only taking a small part. For the rest he would stand in the prompter's corner, and watch the progress of his handiwork.

He responded to the millionaire's summons without any undue display of alacrity. He left him ample time in the library before presenting himself. His purpose was obvious and well calculated. When he finally entered the room, he came almost without any sound, turning the handle of the door with what seemed unnecessary caution.

Again was his object plain. His first sight of Alexander Hendrie was of a great man standing before a window examining, with painful intensity, a large sheet of white blotting-paper. This was as Angus had hoped, but there was something else that gave him even keener satisfaction.

He was studying the man's head, with its wonderful mane of fair hair. His face was turned three-quarters toward him, so that the light of the window shone down on the white surface of the paper.

He had seen Hendrie in most of his moods, he had studied him a hundred times, but never, in all his long years of association with him, had he witnessed such an expression as he now beheld.

The fair, rather sunburned complexion was deadly pale, the bushy brows were drawn harshly together, the lips, contrary to their usual custom in repose, were slightly parted. But it was the steel-gray eyes of the man that most held and, perhaps, pleased Angus. There was no light in them

that suggested violent fury. They were cold, dreadfully cold and cruel, like the steely gray of a puma's. There was pain in them, too. But it was a pain that did not suggest helpless yielding. On the contrary Angus recognized the look he had once or twice seen before, when Hendrie had contemplated crushing some opponent to his schemes. There was an atmosphere about his whole expression that was utterly merciless.

Angus moved across the soft carpet without any sound. He halted in full view of the sheet of paper, bearing its impress of those three tell-tale words with the culminating blot. So engrossed was Hendrie that he did not appear to observe his manager's approach, yet he gave no start, or sign, when the latter's harsh voice broke the silence—

"You sent for me? I'd heard you'd got back."

Then a strange thing happened. Hendrie laughed without looking up.

"Why, yes," he said. "I sent for you. You can tell the man I shan't need the automobile."

Angus waited, studying the profile of the man beside him. He felt that something was coming. The stillness, the unnatural calm of the other was too pronounced.

Presently Hendrie looked up, and Angus mentally rubbed his eyes. The man was smiling—smiling pleasantly. But he did not put the paper aside.

"Sort of curious," he said, with a half humorous dryness. "You never think of the blotting-pad you're writing on. It's just there, and when you've written you just turn your paper over and blot it. You do it a hundred times, and it never seems to occur to you that you're doing—something foolish. Guess the folks who used to use sand had more sense."

Angus nodded. Something told him that his eyes were clear enough now. He gazed meaningly at the paper.

"Guess Mrs. Hendrie being away, the maids just fancy they can do as they please."

In a moment the change Angus had been awaiting came. In a flash hell seemed to be looking out of the millionaire's eyes.

"That's my wife's writing!" he cried, while one great hand gripped the manager's shoulder with crushing force.

Angus stared into the man's livid face, and, as eye sought eye, he knew that at last he was gazing into the torn soul of his employer.

CHAPTER XIV

A MAN'S HELL

DESPERATE, silent moments passed while the terrible eyes of the millionaire looked into, through, beyond, the almost expressionless face of his manager. Then, at last, all at once, his hand relaxed its painful grip upon the man's muscular shoulder, and—he laughed.

His laugh was unaccompanied by any words that justified the abrupt change. To Angus it brought a feeling of relief. His imagination was not acute. It is doubtful if he realized the lack of mirth, the hollow, false ring of that laugh. All he knew was that he felt as though some living volcano under him had suddenly ceased to threaten, and he was given a respite. Alexander Hendrie walked across to the desk, and flung his bulk into the sumptuously upholstered chair that stood before it. He swung it round, and pointed at a chair near by, and facing him, so placed that the light fell full upon the face of its occupant.

"Sit down," he commanded, with cold authority.

Angus obeyed, waiting and wondering. Hendrie's present mood was entirely new to him. He had stirred the fires in this man, and must now watch, and wait, to see how they burned.

But the result was elusive. Hendrie reached out and drew the cigar cabinet toward him. With deliberate care he selected a cigar, and pushed the cabinet within the other's reach.

"Smoke," he said laconically; and Angus fingered one of the priceless cigars tenderly.

Hendrie pierced the end of his cigar with elaborate care. He lit it. Then he leaned back in the chair, and, locking his fingers, rested his elbows upon the arms of it, while his eyes remained upon the blotting-sheet in front of him.

Presently he looked round, and a swift, cold glance shot into Angus Moraine's face.

"When I came in here I'd sent for you," he said. "You were in your quarters—which was not usual at this time." He paused. Then he went on. "Being in your quarters you could have joined me in thirty seconds. You came after ten minutes or so. When you came, you came quietly. Guess you stole into the room—to see what I was doing. Why? Because you had discovered this blotting-sheet—with its writing. You'd found it, examined it, and placed it back in the pad *reversed;* and—you knew it was my wife's writing. Guess you've something to tell me—go ahead."

The directness of the challenge was so characteristic of Hendrie that Angus was not wholly unprepared for it. The keen analysis of his personal attitude disconcerted him, perhaps, but, after a moment's thought, it left him comparatively untroubled. It was only another exhibition of Hendrie's wonderful mentality—that mentality which had carried him soaring above the heads of all his rivals.

"How much d'you want to know?"

For a second Hendrie's cold, gray eyes lit, then his swift command came with tremendous yet restrained heat.

"All, damn you, all!"

Angus flushed. There was no resentment in him at the other's tone. His flush was inspired by some feeling of satisfaction.

He pointed at the blotting-sheet.

"Guess that Frank has another name. Leastways I should say it is 'Frank Smith,' who registers in that name at the Russell Hotel in Everton—mostly when you're away."

The millionaire's eyes were intent upon the blotting-sheet. He offered no comment.

"The townsfolk have seen him riding with Mrs. Hendrie—quite a lot—when you're away. He's a big feller. Bigger than you. He's got thick fair hair, and is a good-looker."

For a second, Hendrie's eyes lifted.

"Young?"

"Anything up to twenty-five."

Hendrie was no longer contemplating the incriminating paper. He was gazing at it, and beyond it, searching the cells of memory.

"Go on," he said. His cigar had gone out.

Angus eyed his employer squarely. Strangely enough a

a twinge of compunction was making itself felt. He drew a deep breath. Somehow the atmosphere of the room had suddenly become oppressive. His cigar had gone out, too.

"Yes," he said. "I saw that writing. I read it. I left it so that when you came in you couldn't miss it. I did these things because—of what I've seen."

"Seen?" Again the millionaire's eyes lifted in the other's direction. It was only for a second. They were back again in an instant, staring beyond the blotting-sheet.

"Yes. It was soon after Mrs. Hendrie came here. You had gone away with the automobile. She wanted a buggy and team. She wanted to study the country and people she was living among. She was away all day. That night I went into Everton. I came to the ford. Guess I heard voices beyond the bluff that separated me from it. One was Mrs. Hendrie's."

"The other?"

"A man's."

Angus paused. The oppressiveness of the room almost stifled him.

"They had spent the day together. The woman was saying what a great time they'd had together. She was arranging when she would see him again. They parted. I heard them kiss each other."

Hendrie swung his chair slowly round. He was smiling. Angus was alarmed. For the first time in his life he experienced a sensation of fear of another man.

"They—kissed?"

There was no emotion in the millionaire's voice. He might have been asking a question of merely ordinary interest.

Angus nodded.

"Yes," he said. "I heard them. I wasn't mistaken, I'm dead sure. Then they parted. Mrs. Hendrie got back across the ford, on to the lower trail with the buggy. The man traipsed on to the hotel. I saw him. It was the man who registers there as 'Frank Smith.' "

"A big man, with thick, fair hair, and—a good-looker?"

Hendrie detailed the description as though registering it in his memory, and comparing it with a picture already there.

"Yes."

"Anything else?"

The millionaire reached for a match and relit his cigar.

"Only this business of going to Calford—with you away. That on top of the writing. That writing was done last night, I guess, and Mrs. Hendrie has mailed no letter since. Maybe she's taken it with her. Maybe she's going to meet him there. Maybe I'm only guessing, but I thought it time you—knew 'bout things."

Angus breathed a sigh. He had done all he intended to do, and now he—wondered.

The millionaire was searching his face with his cold, keen eyes, but he was still smiling. It was that smile which Angus feared. However, he faced the scrutiny, watching the upward curling of the smoke from the other's cigar, while he relit and puffed a little unsteadily at his own.

"Well?" he said, after a long silence.

Hendrie withdrew his gaze and turned to his desk again.

"Better not cancel the car. I'll need it after all."

Angus rose.

"That all?"

Hendrie reached for a pen, and dipped it in the ink as though about to write. He replied without looking up.

"That's all."

Angus moved toward the door. As he reached it the millionaire's voice stopped him.

"Angus!"

The manager turned. Across the room he beheld a pair of glowing eyes fixed upon him. He saw nothing else. They seemed to occupy his entire focus, devouring him with their merciless stare.

"If what you've told me is not true I'll—kill you."

The words were quietly spoken. They were spoken too quietly. They came coldly to the departing man, and like an icy blast they left him shivering. He knew they were meant, not as a mere expression of anger, but literally. He knew that this man would have no scruples, no mercy. No one who had offended need expect mercy from him—not even the wife whom he knew he loved above all things in the world.

"They are true," he returned.

The basilisk eyes passed out of his focus as Hendrie's head bent over the paper before him.

"We shall see."

As the door softly closed behind the manager, Hendrie flung his pen down upon the writing-pad. He sat back in his chair, and his eyes stared in the direction of the closed door.

He sat quite still. His hard face had lost no color, there was not a sign of emotion in it. His cold eyes gazed on a dead level at—nothing. Never was there an exhibition of more perfect outward control of a storming brain within. He was thinking, thinking with the lightning rapidity of the perfect machinery of a powerful brain. He was thinking along lines all wholly unexplored and new to him, and such was his concentrative power that no feelings were permitted to confuse the flow.

His whole future was at stake. His whole life. Everything—everything that mattered.

The time passed rapidly. Still that silent figure sat on. The automobile was brought round, and a servant announced it. It was kept waiting.

What agony of mind and heart Alexander Hendrie went through as he sat there in his splendid library none would ever know. That hell had opened before his startled eyes, that the wounded heart within him had received a mortal blow, there could be no possible doubt. But his sufferings were his own. He had all the brute nature in him which sends a dying animal to the remotenesses of the forest, where no eyes can witness its sufferings, where it may yield up its savage spirit beyond the reach of the pity and sympathy of its fellow-creatures.

CHAPTER XV

PROGRESS OF AFFAIRS

Angus Moraine had done his work. That his motive in enlightening his employer upon those matters which went on in his absence was largely spleenful, even revengeful, there could be no doubt. But, curiously enough, he had kept to the baldest truth. He had neither exaggerated nor in-

vented. Perhaps he had felt that there was no need for either. As he marshaled his facts they were so complete, so entirely damning, that it is doubtful if imagination would have served his purpose better. In spite of Hendrie's threat against his life he was well enough satisfied with the effect of his story upon his employer.

Later on, when Hendrie finally departed, he was still more satisfied; for it was then, as the latter paced the broad, flagged terrace fronting the entrance to the house, he had walked at his side for more than half an hour, receiving final instructions, and listening to some necessary details of future plans.

Hendrie was going away, and Angus was to inform his wife, when she returned from Calford, that he did not expect to return for at least two weeks. In the meantime he gave his manager a telephone number in Gleber! This number would find him at any time, after his wife's return from Calford. Further, he told him that the only message he required from him was news of Mr. Frank Smith's reappearance in Everton. He did not know, as a matter of fact, that he would want it at all, but it must be sent. Furthermore, on Mr. Frank Smith's reappearance in Everton, Angus must hold himself on hand at the Russell Hotel.

"See here," Hendrie concluded, in his concise fashion. "You'll need to be on hand at any moment while this man's around. And—you must know his movements to the last detail. Get me?"

Angus understood. Nor had he forgotten the coldly delivered threat in the library.

"Well," the other went on, with a calmness that was still the marvel of the Scot, "guess I'll get going. I'm going right on to Calford to meet Mrs. Hendrie. She'd be disappointed if I didn't look her up, having missed her here. So long."

Hendrie entered the waiting car, and the two men parted without a sign of that which lay between them. Angus watched the machine roll away down the winding trail, which followed the bend of the picturesque river bank. Then, as it disappeared from view, he turned thoughtfully away, and moved off in the direction of his quarters.

His years of association with the millionaire had taught

him much that the world did not know of that individual's character. There were times, even, when he believed he knew all there was to know of it. There were other times when he was not so sure; just as there were times when some trifling detail brought out a trait that was entirely new to him. At such times he was wont to admit that the man was unfathomable. That is what he admitted to himself now. What did he contemplate? What subtle scheme was in the back of his great head? There was some definite purpose, he felt sure; some definite and, perhaps, deadly purpose. And it was demanded of him to play his part in it, not with eyes wide open, and with full understanding. But blindly groping—in the dark.

He thought for long as he sat in his office. He considered every detail of the instructions he had received. But the ultimate object of them eluded him. However, his mind was made up from the outset. Come what may, his life was bound up with the life of this man. He would follow him whithersoever he led, and, since it was necessary—blindly.

The supper-room in the Strathmore Hotel at Calford was a blaze of light. The string band, screened off behind a decorative display of palms and ferns, was playing the latest and most popular ragtime. But the room, with its hundred tables, was less than half full, in spite of the important agricultural congress that was being held in this capital of the wheat lands.

The truth was that the late meal was always at an awkward hour in the hotels which catered for a wealthy transient custom. The east and west-bound mails met at Calford at eleven-thirty at night, just at the time when most of the hotel guests were either preparing to start, or transacting the last few details of their business before departing on their transcontinental journeys.

But Monica was delighted at this absence of a crowd. For her, it was one of those happy, utterly unanticipated moments in life which are too precious to miss. Just as she had retired to her room after dinner, a chambermaid had announced the arrival of her husband.

Her journey had been taken quite openly. There had been no secrecy about it. She was here purely on business,

the nature of which was her own. Therefore she had nothing to fear, and was frankly overjoyed at this unexpected reunion.

Alexander Hendrie was in his best spirits. He explained to her his journey to Deep Willows, and his subsequent disappointment at not finding her there. Then, hearing that she had driven over to Calford, he had followed her at once. The journey, he explained, suited his purpose well, for he must leave by the night mail for Winnipeg, and did not anticipate returning home for ten days, or even two weeks.

So Monica spent a happy evening with her husband. His manner was the brightest she had ever known. He never questioned her presence in Calford, but took it for granted she was "doing" the stores. He talked to her of his work and informed her of the progress of the Trust. His hopes and fears he talked of unreservedly, and Monica felt that never was a woman so blessed with the perfect confidence of such a husband.

Thus the brief evening was spent until the final meal of the day came round. Monica required nothing more to eat, and suggested that her husband's meal should be served in her sitting-room. But Hendrie demurred, and it was finally arranged that they should adjourn to the supper-room, where Monica could partake of an oyster cocktail, while he fortified himself against his journey.

As the meal drew to a close, and the man leisurely sipped his coffee, he expressed his cordial regrets at his prolonged absences from home.

"It'll soon be over, Mon," he said thoughtfully. "I can see the end of things looming already. Such separations as ours are not good, are they? I shall be glad when—things are settled."

Monica gazed happily into his steady eyes.

"I'm simply yearning for that time to come, Alec," she cried, her eyes shining across the table into his. "But these separations will soon pass," she went on hopefully, "now that I am going to be so busy. Do you know, I don't think Angus thinks I'm capable of running the farm? But I'm just going to show him that I am."

Hendrie's eyes looked a swift inquiry.

"Has he said so—to you?" he asked.

Monica remembered in time. She had no desire to injure the man.

"Oh, no," she declared. "Only—only—I don't think he trusts me. I don't think he has much of an opinion of women."

At that moment a waiter approached.

"The east-bound mail has been signaled, Mr. Hendrie. She's due in twenty minutes."

"Thanks." Hendrie nodded and turned to Monica.

"Angus is a curious fellow—but he's very loyal to me. He would never do anything he considered detrimental to my interests, and he'd surely see that no one else did. I don't know about his opinions of women, but"—he smiled—"I think he's sore at leaving the farm."

Monica nodded and smiled.

"I'm sure he is," she said, as they rose from the table.

They passed out into the vestibule where a man stood waiting to assist the millionaire to the train.

"However, Mon," Hendrie said, smiling inscrutably. "I don't think you'll find any lack of attention or consideration on Moraine's part during my present absence. I've left him definite instructions to help you in your study of the farm. It's my wish you see everything carried out in the work. And I've told him so. I don't guess he'll make any mistake. And you, Mon—I want you to learn it all. Even if things sometimes come amiss, or—or at awkward times, and inconvenience you. I want you to promise me all this, too."

Monica smiled joyously.

"Promise? Why, of course, Alec," she cried. "Why, if I have to turn out in the middle of the night it will be no great hardship."

"Splendid." Hendrie smiled, but his eyes avoided the woman's. "Well, now—good-bye," he said, and held out his hand.

For a moment Monica hesitated. Then she remembered where she was, and they shook hands like two friends.

"Good-bye—dear," she murmured.

A moment later the waiter was enveloping Hendrie in his light traveling coat.

With a nod and a wave of the hand he hastily followed

the man, and made his way through the revolving door, which was the hotel entrance to the railroad depot.

Monica looked after him, feeling a little depressed. It was the first time since her marriage that her husband had left her with a formal parting. She knew it could not have been otherwise in the vestibule of a busy hotel. It would have been different had they supped in private—ah, well, soon there would be no such partings as these.

In contrast to the brilliant surroundings of the Strathmore Hotel the humble homestead over which Phyllis Raysun reigned was a crude, even squalid affair. Poverty was stamped all over it, that is, if lack of worldly possessions and general dilapidation must be taken as the hallmark of poverty.

Phyllis did not admit such to be the case. She claimed a wealth which she would not have exchanged for the lot of a royal princess. She was a healthy, happy girl, loving and beloved, and she admitted she could ask no more of the perfect life in the midst of which she found herself.

For her mother's occasional grumbles she would adapt her mental attitude to a different focus. That weak but amiable creature had different views. She had lived through that life Phyllis was only just beginning, and therefore the golden focus of youth was dimmed, and the buoyant hope of younger life had resolved itself into a yearning for all those bodily comforts which had somehow passed her by.

At such times when her mother's bitterness and complaint found expression, Phyllis, with her ready understanding, sought to comfort her, to encourage her. Some such desire stirred her on a morning when a neighbor brought her a letter from Frank. It was a letter passed on from hand to hand, across country, without the service of the mail. Frank would be over at the midday meal, and Mrs. Raysun was deploring the poverty of their larder, as she prepared a stew at the cook stove in their only living-room.

"It makes me fair ashamed, Phyl," the old woman cried in distress, as she cut up the mixture of vegetables for the simmering pot. "It surely does. To think of your beau comin' over to a meal like this. And him a college-bred boy, with elegant manners, and with a ma with thousands o'

dollars. I kind o' feel the shame's all on me—your mother."

Phyllis laughed in her buoyant fashion.

"Is it, momma?" she cried. "Where? How? Oh, you dear old—old goose. If I was a princess with all the world mine, and I gave half of it to Frank, I shouldn't be giving him any more than—that stew. The best we've got is Frank's, and we sure can't do more. And," she added tenderly, "I guess Frank wouldn't want more." Then she smiled slyly. "Frank would rather have one of your stews here than oysters on the half shell in any other house."

"House? House, my dear? Call this hog pen a—house?" cried Pleasant, a flush of shame dyeing her plump cheeks.

"It's a palace—to Frank and me—when we're eating your stew in it. Yes, momma, and the meal's a banquet. Oh, don't you see, dear? We're just two silly folks up to our eyes in love with each other, and—and nothing matters. Listen, momma. Frank's getting his money right away. He's located his farm, and he's going to buy it in a week or two. We're going to get married, and—and we're going to move to the new farm just as soon as we've harvested our crops here—all of us. You, too. It's a swell house, just what you like. And we're going to have 'hands' to work for us, and Frank's fairy godmother looking on and helping us to be as happy as happy. Oh, momma, we won't grumble a thing. Just let's remember that we've got to do our best in whatever lot we find ourselves."

Pleasant Raysun could never resist her daughter's bright hope for long. The girl never failed to put fresh heart into her. Like all weak natures, she needed the constant support of a heart stronger than her own. Phyllis understood this, and the support was never begrudged, never withheld.

Nor was the girl's declaration lacking in confirmation when Frank appeared. He had lost the last vestige of any outward signs of the shame he believed attached to him through his birth. Here again it was Phyllis who had dispelled the ugly clouds which had threatened to envelop and stifle him.

Now, as he came, he sniffed the air pervading the kitchen with appreciation, and Phyllis smiled across at her mother.

"I didn't know I was hungry until now," he declared. "It surely was a bright thought of mine letting you two know

ahead I was coming, Phyl. I bet five dollars it's a jack-rabbit stew. Any takers?"

He looked from one to the other with his happy, open face, all smiles. Then, as Phyllis shook her head, he pretended disappointment.

"No luck," he said, with an absurd air of dejection.

The girl admonished him in the lightest spirit of raillery.

"You don't want it all—the luck, I mean, not the stew," she said severely. "Anyway, you're not getting the stew yet. Momma's particular how long it cooks."

"Not for nigh an hour," smiled Pleasant from the stove.

"Then I'll tighten my belt like a starving explorer," cried the boy.

The old woman turned about, and waved a tin spoon at them both.

"If you're that hungry you can't wait, Frank Burton, I guess Phyl'd better take you out to the barn an' feed you hay. There's more than hosses and cattle eats hay."

Phyllis laughed.

"There you are, Frank. That's deadly insult. What you going to do 'bout it? Do you hear what momma's calling you?"

The youth fingered one ear ruefully.

"They must have grown some," he said doubtfully. Then he looked up with a laugh. "Guess maybe she's right, though. Come on, Phyl, sweet hay's not half bad fodder for a hungry—— Say, if you come right along, I'll tell you all about the farm while I eat it. How's that?"

Phyllis needed no second bidding, and, together, they passed out of the kitchen.

It was a favorite place of theirs to sit outside the low doorway of the sod-built barn. An old log served the girl as a resting place, and the huge youth spread himself on the ground beside her, propping his elbow on the same log, so that his tawny head was nearly on a level with her rounded shoulder.

"Phyl," he cried, as soon as they were settled, "mother's a—a trump. It's all fixed. I've given old Sam Bernard notice I'm quitting. The old boy's hard hit—in a way. I believe he likes me some. I told him I'd come along back and help him harvest. And I'm going to help you harvest, too.

But that's afterwards. First I'm going to see mother and get the money, then I'm going to buy the farm. Then I'm going to see certain things put in readiness for fall work. Then I'm coming along back here, and we're going right in to Calford to buy up fixings for our new home. Then, after harvest, we're—going to get married. How?"

Phyllis smiled down into the eager, upturned face, with that wise motherly little smile which was so much a part of her attitude toward those belonging to her, those she loved.

"How? Why, then you're going to come right down to earth and say it all over again," she said, with gentle eagerness. "Say it all again, Frank, and say it slowly. I—I don't want to miss any of it. It's all—all too good to miss. Oh, I'm so happy I want to laugh and cry at the same time. I—I want to take the whole world in my arms and hug it."

"Won't I do?" suggested the young giant, sitting up promptly.

The girl nodded demurely.

"Perhaps, as—a substitute."

She bent over him, and placing her arms about his great neck kissed him very tenderly.

She sighed as she released him.

"Now let's be sensible," she said soberly. "Now tell it me all again."

She was promptly obeyed. But again Frank's enthusiasm took hold of him, and he poured out in a rapid flow all his hopes of their future. He ran over in brief review the many trifling schemes he had already worked out in conjunction with the running of their new farm. He rattled on over numberless developments he proposed. He told her of the beautiful red pine frame farm buildings, which must have cost as much to build as he was paying for the whole place. He spoke of the acres of splendid timber in glowing terms. Then there was the river frontage, and, yes—actually—the outcrop of a coal seam was jutting right out of its bank.

When he had finished, the girl's delight was shining in her eyes.

"And—and when am I going to see it all?" she asked, as he paused for breath.

The man's fair face flushed and beamed.

"Ah," he cried, "that's what I've been saving up. I never

suggested your seeing it before, Phyl, because—because ——" his eyes became thoughtful, "well—I didn't just want to take a risk. You see, I was 'most afraid something might happen to queer things. Guess I wouldn't disappoint you for worlds. I'd a notion to wait till there was no chance of anything going wrong with the deal. Say, you're going with me to pay the money—you and your mother. Then we're going on to see the farm."

The girl did not answer. She was gazing out at the barren sky-line, all her happy soul shining in the wonderful light of her eyes. Mutely she was thanking God for the love of this man, thanking Him for the wonderful blessings He was pouring upon her. Whatever else might come in the long years of life before her, the memory of this moment would live with her to her dying day. She was very—very happy.

After a while she drew a deep sigh, and, reaching out, pointed away to the distant lines where the sharp horizon of the prairie cut across the sky.

"Look!" she cried, in a thrilling voice. "Look, Frank, over there in the East! There's not a cloud anywhere. It's bright, bright. The sky's just blue with a wonderful color that shines down upon a thankful world, watching and waiting for the harvest. We're waiting for the harvest, too. Perhaps ours isn't just the same harvest other folks are waiting for. Maybe ours is the harvest of our souls. Let it be an omen to us. Just as it is the omen the farmer looks for. It kind of seems to me all blessings come from yonder. Guess that's where the sun rises, bringing with it the hope of the world. Hope and light. Yes, it kind of seems to me everything good comes out of the East. That's how the Bible tells us. We don't look west till afternoon, the afternoon of life. That's because it's full of—decay. That's where a tired sun just hangs heavily in the sky. A poor old sun, looking kind of sad and weary. It's got so busy making folks happy in the morning that its plumb beat, and can't help itself against those banks of black cloud all fixed up with deep angry light, trying to deceive the poor old thing, and make it believe they aren't just going to swallow it right up, and stifle it, and put out its light. No, this is still our morning, so we'll look out east for all the good things to come. It's very, very bright."

Frank mechanically followed the direction of the girl's happy eyes. But his own feelings, though no less happy and thankful, had no such means of expression.

"Yes," he said lamely. "It is bright, isn't it?"

"Bright?" The shining eyes looked down into his handsome face, and again they smiled with that sweet, motherly tenderness. "Yes, dear."

Her simple agreement set the other racking his brains to let her understand that he appreciated her mood. He flushed as he reached for one of her hands and squeezed it.

"That's how I want to make it for you—always," he said, with clumsy sincerity. "Just sunshine. We mustn't have clouds."

The girl shook her head.

"But we must, dear," she said decidedly. "Say, Frank, just think what life would be without them." Her manner had once more drifted into that curious earnestness that sat so oddly upon one of her years and happy temperament. "Think of it. A whole long life spent in the glaring light of a summer's day. It couldn't be done, Frank. It sure couldn't. That way there'd be no sort of hope, no sort of ambition, and—and our hearts would be all wilted up with a terrible sickness. No, we want clouds, too—in their season. Do you know, Frank, it's just in the dark, dark clouds that hope hides itself. No clouds, no hope. And hope's just what we live on. Happiness helps to make us strong, but too much happiness would be the worst misery."

The youth beside her sat up.

"Phyl," he cried, helpless, "you do know an awful lot. Say——" But Phyllis laughed and shook her head.

"I know I'm dreadfully happy," she cried. Then she gazed seriously into his eyes. "Tell me, Frank, doesn't it make you think—notions when you're dreadful happy?"

The other shook his head.

"I just feel—happy," he said. "That's all."

"It does me," Phyllis cried rapturously. "And it's times like this that I just want to know—know—know, until there's not a thing left—to know. Do you know, sometimes I've a sort of crazy notion, there's some one—big—trying to teach me lots an lots. He often seems to be around—'specially when I'm not out plowing. I'm mostly happy then.

It's somebody very big—and wide—and he's always whispering to me—just as if he was in the air of these plains——"

Frank threw out one great hand to stay her. A sudden inspiration had penetrated his simple mind.

"I know," he cried, breaking in quickly. "That's not—somebody. That's you. That's you, Phyl." He drew himself up on to his knees in the excitement of his discovery. "That's your soul talking to you, Phyl. It's feeling so good it must tell you 'bout things. I know. I've had it. And you sort of listen and listen, and you—you just know what it says is—is right. And you don't need any one to tell you it isn't, because—because you know it is——"

"Ho! you two folks, the stew's through!"

Frank swung round at the sound of Mrs. Raysun's voice calling, and he flushed self-consciously as he realized the ridiculousness of his attitude. Phyl sprang from her seat and, catching hold of his great hand, helped him to his feet.

"Come along, dear," she cried, smiling merrily. "Momma's stews are too good to keep waiting, even if our souls want to tell us a whole heap that is good for us to know."

Then, as they walked side by side toward the house, she drew a deep breath.

"Heigho!" she sighed. "And to think in a few weeks we'll have left all this behind us for a lovely, lovely farm of our own—a beautiful frame house—folks working for us and—and money in the bank. Say, Frank, isn't it a beautiful world? It surely is—some world."

CHAPTER XVI

IN THE MOONLIGHT

Angus Moraine flung down his pen impatiently. Leaning back in his chair he turned toward the sunlit window, gazing through it at the distant view of golden wheat as a man will who seeks relief from intolerable thought.

His thought was intolerable. It was growing more and more intolerable as the days passed and the time drew on when he must hand Deep Willows over to his successor.

All the best years of his life had been spent in the making of Deep Willows. All his energy, all that was best in him;

these things had been given freely, without stint, without thought of sparing himself in the work, and he believed the result to be a worthy achievement.

But it was not yet finished. He doubted if it would ever be finished. He had dreamed his dreams, and those dreams had carried him into realms of such colossal fancy that he knew, if he lived to a hundred, the time would be wholly inadequate for the fulfilment of his ambitions.

The wealth which must inevitably come in the process of the achievement he had set himself was not the goal he desired to win. He admitted the use of such wealth, and knew that without it the rest must fall to the ground. But his dream was of achievement alone. He had no desire to be remembered for the fortune he had amassed. His absorbing passion was to be thought of, by coming generations, for an achievement unlike that of any other.

Deep Willows was the nucleus about which he had hoped to build his edifice. Vaguely he saw it the center of a world of wheat. He imagined the whole prairie lands of Canada clad in the golden raiment of a perfect wheat harvest. Not merely a farm, but a country of wheat, acknowledging a single control. Nor did it matter to him whose the control so long as *his was the making.*

This was his dream and now—he saw it fading before his very eyes at the whim of the man he had so long and so faithfully served. The thought of it was intolerable. Sometimes, even, rebellion choked all his friendship, all his loyalty to the man who had made something of the realization of his dreams possible.

But there was just one shadow of hope left to him. It was very slight, very vague, and he hardly understood whither it led, he hardly knew if it were worth serious consideration at all. But the feeling was there; nor would it be denied. If only he knew what far-reaching scheme, with regard to his wife, lay in the back of Hendrie's great head he might feel easier. But he did not know, and, until such schemes were put into practice, he was not likely to know. Still the fact remained; Mrs. Hendrie had been appointed his successor, and, since that appointment, she had fallen from her high place in her husband's regard, or, at least, was tottering on her exalted pedestal.

The thought gave him some slight satisfaction. If—if only something would happen in time. If—only. He felt at that moment he would willingly give half his possessions to be able to search the hidden recesses of Hendrie's secret thought and find out for certain—what was going to happen.

He sighed and stirred restlessly, and, as he did so, a horseman rode past the window and pulled up at his door. Then Angus Moraine did something quite contrary to his rule. He rose swiftly from his chair, and, crossing the room hastily, flung open the door. The horseman was a special messenger he had sent into Everton.

The man was one of his foremen, a young Swede to whom he generally entrusted any confidential duty.

"Well, Jan?" he demanded, with something like cordiality, as the man flung out of the saddle.

The Swede dived one hand into the bosom of his loose cotton shirt.

"One letter, boss," he replied, producing an ordinary business envelope.

"Ah. Anything else?" There was eagerness in Angus's inquiry as he took the letter and read the address in Hendrie's handwriting.

"Guess I took a peek at the hotel register," Jan replied at once.

"Yes?" There was a further quickening of interest in the manager's tone.

"I see the name you wanted. Frank Smith. Guess he registered in at dinner time."

The narrow eyes of the Scot lit.

"At dinner time?"

"Yep. That's how it was marked. Say——"

"Well?"

"He's a tall guy. Sort o' tow hair. Young. Maybe round about twenty?"

Angus nodded.

'Then I see him, too. He was sittin' in the office."

"Good."

There was no doubt as to Moraine's approval now, and Jan felt he had done well.

"Anything else, boss?" he inquired confidently.

Angus remained thinking for some seconds. Then he shook his head.

"Nothing," he said finally.

The Swede mounted his horse. As he was about to ride off Angus detained him.

"Send me over my horse," he said casually. "After that you best get around and see they're setting those 'smudge' fires right. We're going to get a chill to-night. We must do what we can to keep the frost out of the crops."

The man rode off, and Angus turned back into his office.

The manager's mood had entirely changed for the better. A sense of elation had replaced the desperate irritation of a few moments before. Was something going to happen at last? It almost looked like it. Frank Smith had registered at Everton, and here was a letter from Hendrie. A letter. It was not Hendrie's way to write letters with the telegraph handy, and the telephone to his hand. He sat down and tore the envelope open.

It contained eight closely written sheets of very thin paper, and Angus smiled as he realized the writer's purpose. The envelope had appeared quite thin. There had been nothing about it to attract attention from the curious.

Straightening out the sheets he settled himself to the perusal of his chief's letter. It was very long, and full of carefully detailed instructions. Furthermore, it was dated at Gleber, and it also informed him of Frank Smith's arrival in Everton! But these things were only a tithe of what the letter told him. It told him so much that his whole interest was fully engrossed, and a curious wonder at the man who had written it stirred within him. With his first reading of the letter a wild hope leaped within him, and, by the time he had finished his second reading, he realized that he need have no further fears of being banished from Deep Willows.

The "something" he had longed for had happened. The scheming mind of Alexander Hendrie had revealed itself to him. After all, fortune was with him, and it was only necessary for him to carry out the instructions set out in the letter for everything to be as he wished.

But there was no time to indulge in the pleasurable reaction inspired by his letter. His orders were imperative and demanded prompt attention. Therefore he refolded the

pages and bestowed them safely. Then, when his horse arrived, he set out at once in the direction of Everton.

Angus Moraine's fears of a summer frost looked like being realized. The night closed down brilliantly fine, with a threatening chill pervading the air. There was no wind, and this was significant. To the weatherwise the sudden dropping of the thermometer was possible at any moment, and the farming world might easily awaken on the morrow to find the harvest prospects destroyed, and the highest grade wheat reduced to something little better than fodder for hogs.

The full moon shone down upon the golden world with a steely gleam upon its cold face, leaving the starry sheet of a cloudless sky rendered almost invisible. It was a dreadfully perfect night, one that might suit lovers, might inspire the romantic, but was anathema to those who lived by the produce of the soil.

The village of Everton was very still and silent amid the woodland shadows in which it lay. The little wooden houses were in darkness, and no sign of life was visible anywhere, except at the hotel, where the yellow lamplight still battled feebly with the overwhelming rays of the brilliant summer moon.

At that moment the whole world seemed to be slumbering peacefully, in the full confidence that no disturbing elements were abroad. Peace—a wonderful peace, such as is only known in close contact with the soil, seemed to reign everywhere. But the mind and heart of man rarely shares in Nature's gentler moods. In waking hours the great battle of life is always raging, and in sleep, restless dreaming pursues its victim. There is little enough of peace for striving humanity.

It was nearly ten o'clock when the glass door of the hotel was pushed open, and a tall man stood gazing out into the brilliant night. The doorway was narrow, and he almost entirely filled it up. The yellow lamplight from behind shone dully upon his fair, bare head, and the cold moonlight shed an artificial pallor upon his good-looking face.

He stood for some moments thus, and his expression was scarcely happy. He seemed lost in some thought which gave

him little enough pleasure. Presently he stirred and thrust the prairie hat he held in his hand upon his head, and drew the brim well down over his eyes. Then with a hunch of the shoulders, the deliberate movement as of a man spurring himself to an unpleasant task, he stepped from the doorway out into the full light of the moon.

He strode off down the trail, white in the brilliant light, at the rapid, swinging gait of one whose destination is definite, and who is anxious to reach it with as little delay as possible.

Presently the woodland bluff in the direction of the river swallowed him up, and even the faint sound of his rapid footsteps became lost in the silence that seemed to close over him.

Scarcely had the last sound of his retreating steps died out when the door of a near-by house opened and a man stepped out on to the veranda. This house, like its fellows, was in darkness. Nor was there any light by which to judge his appearance, but that which was shed by the moon. However, this revealed his size, which was much above the average, and showed him to be a man of years and full proportions.

He waited for a moment, gazing about him, then, as another figure appeared round the side of the hotel, he quickly left his veranda and hurried across the intervening space to join the newcomer.

After a few moments' earnest conversation they, too, set off down the trail. But whereas the first man's movements were devoid of any attempt at concealment, these two moved cautiously, even furtively, as though they had no desire for recognition.

Finally the woodland bluff swallowed them up, and all was still again.

But it was not for long. Within ten minutes the hotel door was again thrust open. This time the figure that appeared was a perfectly familiar one. It was Angus Moraine, and he was accompanied by the proprietor of the place. There was apparently nothing unusual about him, except a marked cordiality. He might simply have been terminating his customary evening visit of recreation, for, as he appeared a "hand" brought his horse round from the barn, and stood awaiting the manager's pleasure to mount.

But for once Angus kept him waiting. His cordial mood

would not permit of a hurried departure, and he stood talking to his companion for some moments.

"I certainly should think about it, Sharpe," he said earnestly. "Guess I'm not a feller given to slinging hot air. I'd start to build quick. Be first. When a place begins to boom you want to be right there, and—collar the trade before other folks get busy. You want to be the leading hotel, and if my help in the way of patronage and recommendation is worth anything to you—why you can have it."

Lionel K. Sharpe listened eagerly.

"It's real kind of you, Mr. Moraine," he said warmly. "But I'm guessin' it's a matter of capital. If this place is to boom——"

"Capital?" Angus snorted. "Pshaw, man! It's nothing to raise the capital."

"No—o." The hotel keeper looked dubious. Then he brightened. "Say, maybe you don't fancy comin' in on the deal yourself, Mr. Moraine?" He eyed his guest shrewdly.

The next moment he received a shock. Angus laughed. And his laugh was the most cordial thing Lionel K. Sharpe ever remembered to have heard emanate from the manager of Deep Willows.

"Why, I hadn't thought of it," that individual declared, when his mirth had subsided. Then he became quite serious. "Say, it's not a bad idea though. You see, I'm here a sort of fixture for life, and I guess it wouldn't be half a bad scheme putting my odd cents into a bright enterprise in Everton. Why, yes, I'll think it over, Sharpe, I'll surely think it over."

He stepped from the porch and took his horse from the patient "hired" man, who promptly vanished to his rest in the harness room of the barn. He sprang lightly into the saddle.

"That's a good notion, Sharpe," Angus went on, as he gathered up the reins. "Guess we'd run a cracking hotel together. Well, so long. We'll talk it over later. So long."

He turned his horse about and set off down the trail, and, in a few moments, he, too, was swallowed up by the woodland shadows.

CHAPTER XVII

PAYING THE PRICE

THE sumptuous library at Deep Willows held a great fascination for Monica. She used it in her solitary moments, during her husband's absences, more than any other living-room in the great house. Perhaps the attraction was the suggestion of office which the beautifully carved mahogany desk gave it. There was the great safe, too, let deep into the wall just behind it, with its disguising simple mahogany door. There were the elaborate filing drawers, and various other appurtenances necessary in a room where business was transacted. Perhaps these things helped to remind her of other days, days that had been often troublesome, but, nevertheless, of a memory that was very dear.

But the official atmosphere of the room was very limited. There was nothing official in the bookcases lining the walls, containing their hundreds of volumes of modern and classical literature. There was nothing suggestive of commerce in the bronzes and marble statuary which adorned the various antique plinths and pedestals. And the pictures, too, modern certainly, but both oil and water colors were by the best living masters. Nor were the priceless Persian rugs the floor coverings one would expect to find on an office floor.

Monica loved the room. There was the character of the man she loved peeping out from every corner at her, every shelf of the bookcases. There was a simple, direct, almost severe style about the place, which reminded her so much of the strength of the man who had taken possession of her soul.

Something of this was in her thought as she sat there in a comfortable rocker on this particular night. A book was in her lap, but she was not reading. There was too much rioting through her busy brain for her to devour the translation of a stodgy, obscure Greek classic. She had taken the book from its place almost at haphazard, as women sometimes will, and her sincere purpose had been to read it. But her purpose lacked the necessary inclination, the moment the cover had been opened.

She made a beautiful picture sitting there in the soft lamplight. Her elaborately simple evening gown was delightfully seductive, and the light upon her fair face surmounted by its crown of waving hair completed an attraction few men could have resisted. The years had left no trace of their rapid passing in her outward seeming, unless it were in the added beauty of her perfect figure. She was happy, very, very happy, and to-night even more so than usual.

To-night! Ah, yes, she had reason to be happy to-night. Was it not the night when the culmination of so many little plans of hers was to be reached? Little plans that had for their inception the purest affection, the most tender loyalty to the dead as well as the living? Monica was a woman to draw the most perfect happiness from such feelings. The mainspring of her whole nature was a generous kindliness, an earnest desire for all that belonged to the better side of life. She knew that she was about to launch two young people upon the great rough sea of life, and the thought that her hand was to pour the calming oil about their little craft was something quite exquisite to one of her nature.

Her gaze wandered across at the mahogany door of the safe, and she smiled as she thought that behind it lay the oil awaiting her distribution. From the safe her eyes passed on to the clock upon the desk. Its hands were nearing midnight. She was glad. They could not move fast enough for her just now.

The whole house was silent. The servants had long since retired; even her maid, that stickler for her duties, had been satisfactorily dismissed for the night. Angus had returned. She had just heard him ride past the house on his way to hand over his horse to the sleepy stable hand awaiting him. There was nothing—nothing at all to interfere with her—— Hark!

She started from her seat and darted across to the heavy curtains drawn over the French window, which she had purposely left open. The sound of steps approaching had reached her. She stood for a moment with hands ready to draw the curtains aside. Then she flung them open, and, with a low exclamation, embraced the fair-haired young giant who stepped in through the window.

"Frank, oh, Frank," she cried. "My dearest, dearest boy.

I'm so thankful you've come. I knew you wouldn't fail me in spite of—of what you said in your letter."

The young man gently released himself, and glanced back shamefacedly at the curtains which had closed behind him.

"That's just it, mother," he said, his honest face flushing. "I—I just hate this backdoor business. Oh, I know it's all right," he went on, as Monica shook her head. "I know there's nothing wrong in it. How can there be? You are my mother. It's not that. It's the feeling it gives me. You don't know how mean it makes me feel."

"Of course it does, dear," Monica said soothingly. "It is like you to feel that way. You have always been the soul of honor, and you feel like a criminal stealing into another man's house. But you are not trespassing, my dear. Don't you understand? You are entering a house to which you have every right. Is it not my home, and am I not your mother?"

"Yes, yes," the man broke in, almost impatiently. "That's where the trouble comes. You are my mother. What if—if I were discovered? What if——?"

Just for a moment a slight look of alarm shadowed Monica's eyes. In the joy at seeing her boy again she had lost sight of the risk this visit really entailed. But she recovered herself quickly, and protested with a lightness she did not really feel.

"Don't let's think of it. Alec is away, and the whole household is in bed and asleep. The last person to go to bed here is Angus Moraine, and he came in from town a few minutes ago. So——"

"Angus Moraine?" Frank raised his brows inquiringly. "He was at the hotel. I saw him there. I have seen him often, and—I don't think I like him."

Monica smiled as she walked across to the safe.

"Sit down at that desk, dear," she said happily, "while I hand you a wedding present, birthday present, coming of age present, all rolled into one. Talking of Angus, I don't think I like him either. But there, we two are very much the same in our likes and dislikes, aren't we?" Then she glanced back at the huge figure obediently settling itself at the desk while she fumbled the combination of the lock. "We both like Phyl Raysun, don't we?" she added slyly.

Frank jumped up from his chair, and his young face had lost its last look of trouble.

"I'm so glad you like her, mother," he cried. "She's a perfect delight. She's so—so wise, too. She's simply fearfully clever. You noticed that. I remember you said so in your letter. And—and isn't she beautiful?"

The safe door swung open, and Monica drew out a large bundle of notes.

"She's as beautiful as only a lover's eyes can see her," she said, with a smile. "She's such a delight, and so beautiful, and so wise, that I'm adding a dowry to the amount I am going to give you to start in business with. It's just a little extra housekeeping money."

There was no doubt of Monica's happiness at that moment. Her eyes were shining with the perfect delight of giving to those she loved.

"Seriously," she went on, "I'm very pleased with Phyl—a pretty name by the way. I'm so glad she is poor, and has been brought up as she has. I don't think you could possibly have made a better choice. I'm sure she's a dear girl. Remember, Frank, you must always treat her well. She adores you, and I want you always to remember that a good woman's love is something to be treasured above—well, everything. Though I am a woman, I warn you it is a priceless thing, and something which, in its unreasoning devotion, in its utter self-sacrifice, in its yielding up of all its most sacred thoughts and feelings, comes straight from God Himself. Care for your little Phyl very tenderly, Frank."

She sighed happily and glanced down at the notes in her hand. Then she went on—

"Now let us consider something much more material. Here is the money, dear. There are twelve thousand dollars in this bundle for you, and another five thousand for your Phyl, and all my love to you both goes with them."

Monica laid the packet of notes on the desk in front of the man, who stared up at her in wondering amazement.

"Oh, mother," he cried, "this is too good altogether. You surely don't mean——"

But his protest was interrupted by the sharp ringing of the telephone bell, and his amazed look was abruptly changed

to one of something like apprehension as he stared at the wretched instrument.

But the sudden emergency found Monica alert. She snatched up the receiver and placed it against her ear.

Two men moved silently along in the shadow of the house. Their feet gave out no sound as they stealthily drew on toward the library windows. They were not walking together, One of them was leading by some yards, as though he were the principal actor in the scene, and the other was there simply to obey his commands.

The face of the leader was stern and set, but his eyes were shining with a desperate passion which belied his outward calm. The other wore a more impassive look. He was alert, but displayed neither eagerness nor emotion.

The leader drew near the open French window and paused listening. He could hear voices; a man's and a woman's, and for a moment, wondered that the window had been left open.

Then the thought was quickly followed up by others of a very different nature, while his ears strained to catch the words passing beyond the drawn curtains. But the sound was muffled, and though the temptation to draw nearer was great he resisted it. He was waiting—waiting for something, and the strain upon his patience was very great.

Then suddenly, faint and muffled, he heard the silvery ringing of a telephone bell. He breathed a sigh as of relief, and, signing to his companion to remain where he was, moved cautiously forward until he stood within the opening of the window.

Now he could plainly hear the woman's voice at the telephone. It was sharp, a little bit unnatural, but it was plainly recognizable and familiar, and, at the sound of it, the man's teeth shut with a vicious snap.

"A letter, did you say? Oh! Yes, I heard you pass. I was busy with some work. . . . Oh you must see me to-night? . . . Oh. . . . Imperative I act on his instructions to-morrow morning. . . . I see. . . . Well, if it's so important I'll come along to your office. . . . No, don't come to me. . . . I'll be with you in a moment. . . . You won't keep me more than a few minutes? . . . All right. . . . It's no trouble."

The waiting man heard the receiver being hung up in its place. Then the woman began speaking rapidly to her companion.

"Oh, Frank, what a nuisance," she cried, in unmistakable annoyance. "It's Angus Moraine. He's had a letter from Alec. It's full of important instructions which he wants me to act on to-morrow morning, so I've got to get them to-night. He says he saw a light in the library when he passed and was relieved to find I was still up. It is a bother, dear, just when I wanted to be with you. Still, he says he won't keep me more than a few minutes. Just think of it, he had intended to come and see me. Suppose he had."

The man's answer came at once.

"If he had the game would have been up all right."

The woman laughed.

"Yes. But he isn't coming. And to make sure I must hurry. Now don't you go dear. It's going to be such a long time before I see you again. I want to make the most of this opportunity. You wait here. I'll be back directly."

"What if any one comes?" The question came sharply from the man—and the eavesdropper's lips pursed grimly.

"No one will come," said the woman promptly.

"But suppose——?"

"Well, if you should hear any one coming, if you should hear anything that alarms your sensitive soul, why, then you have the money, and all my love, take them both, and go the way you came. In the meantime, in case——"

The man at the window writhed as he heard the distinct sound of a kiss. The control he was exercising was strained to its limits. The next moment the rustle of skirts, and, at last, the closing of a door, told him all he had been waiting for.

Suddenly he drew the curtains apart and closed them sharply behind him.

CHAPTER XVIII

A MAN'S HONOR

"WELL?"

The monosyllabic challenge bit through the silence of the room. It was hard, cruel, and full of unmistakable menace.

The man at the desk leaped from his seat and faced about, glaring in the direction whence the voice had proceeded.

He faced the accusing figure of Alexander Hendrie with a desperate, hunted look in his widening eyes, and, curiously, in the horror of the moment, amid the turmoil of alarm that filled his heart and brain, he found himself surveying the intruder with a closeness of observation only to be expected in moments of perfect tranquility.

His eyes caught the man's mane of hair, slightly graying at the temples. He noted the cold gleam of the gray eyes leveled straight at his. He realized the meaning of the harsh, tightly compressed mouth, and the gripping muscles of the wide, bull-dog jaw. There was a peculiar hunch to the man's broad shoulders, which suggested nothing so much as an animal crouching to spring. All these things he saw, and read, and he knew that a merciless fury was raging behind the calm mask of this husband of his mother.

In a flash his own nerve steadied, and a desperate calmness succeeded the first shock of horror.

"Well?" he retorted, and moistened his parching lips.

To an on-looker, undisturbed by the tension of the moment, a curious realization must inevitably have occurred. It was the extraordinary likeness existing between these two. The older man displayed the maturity of his years in his increasing bulk, but the likeness was scarcely lessened by it. There was the same hair, the same cast of feature. The younger man's eyes were blue and his height was greater. but the breadth of shoulder, the bone and muscle were similar.

Yet neither of them realized the likeness. All their

thought was eaten up by a growing antagonism, antagonism in one that was well-nigh murderous, and in the other, simply that of a man, who finds himself pre-judged, found guilty and sentenced for some crime of which he is wholly ignorant and innocent.

Hendrie caught at the retort with lessening restraint. He pointed at the open safe and the bundle of notes which Frank still clutched in his hand.

"Red-handed," he said. Then as the incredulous youth made a movement of protest, the other's hand slipped round to his hip pocket with a movement not to be mistaken. "Don't move," he said quickly.

Hendrie's command had instant effect. Frank stood quite still. Then his appalled amazement found sudden and violent expression.

"Good God!" he cried. "What do you mean? Do you take me for—a low-down thief?"

Hendrie's eyes never once relaxed their cruel stare.

"What are you then?"

Frank glanced at the open safe, and his horrified eyes came back to the pile of notes he was still grasping.

"You mean——" he began. Then indignation overcame every other feeling. "This money was——"

Again he broke off, and this time a cold sweat broke out upon his forehead. Only just in time did he realize what the admission he was about to make would entail. Suddenly he beheld the hideous trap gaping to ensnare him.

To say that his mother, this man's wife, had given him the money, that her hand had unlocked the safe, that he and she had been in that room together, would be to betray her secret and yield up to the last man in the world whom she wished should learn it, the story of—her shame.

His throat had dried up suddenly, and an awful sickness pervaded his stomach. His imagination became fired. What could he do? The possibility of such a situation had never entered his head. He was helpless. Explanation was denied him. He could only stand there, a convicted felon, caught, as Hendrie had so mercilessly declared, "red-handed." Not for one moment did he dream of taking the other course. To betray his mother, the woman who had devoted her life to him, it was out of the question. His

nature was incapable of such a thing. Cost him what it might—even life itself—her honor was safe with him.

As the realization of his terrible position came to him, a fresh anxiety grew; an anxiety that was wholly unselfish. He dreaded lest she should return. He knew her goodness, her generosity. That painful secret she had hugged to herself for all these long years would be promptly yielded up to save him. He prayed that her return to the room might be delayed until—until——

He looked into the merciless eyes of his accuser whose harsh voice broke the silence—

"You were going to say it was given you. Go on."

But Frank had no answer. A dogged silence seemed to be the only thing possible, and Hendrie was left to do the talking.

"You were going to say that that money had been given you by some one—my wife?" He laughed without mirth. "Guess you'd best finish your story. Shall I send for my wife to corroborate it? How'd you fancy that? I'd think a thief would have a better yarn than that. The money was given you!"

The man's sarcasm goaded his victim beyond endurance, and dogged silence gave way before it.

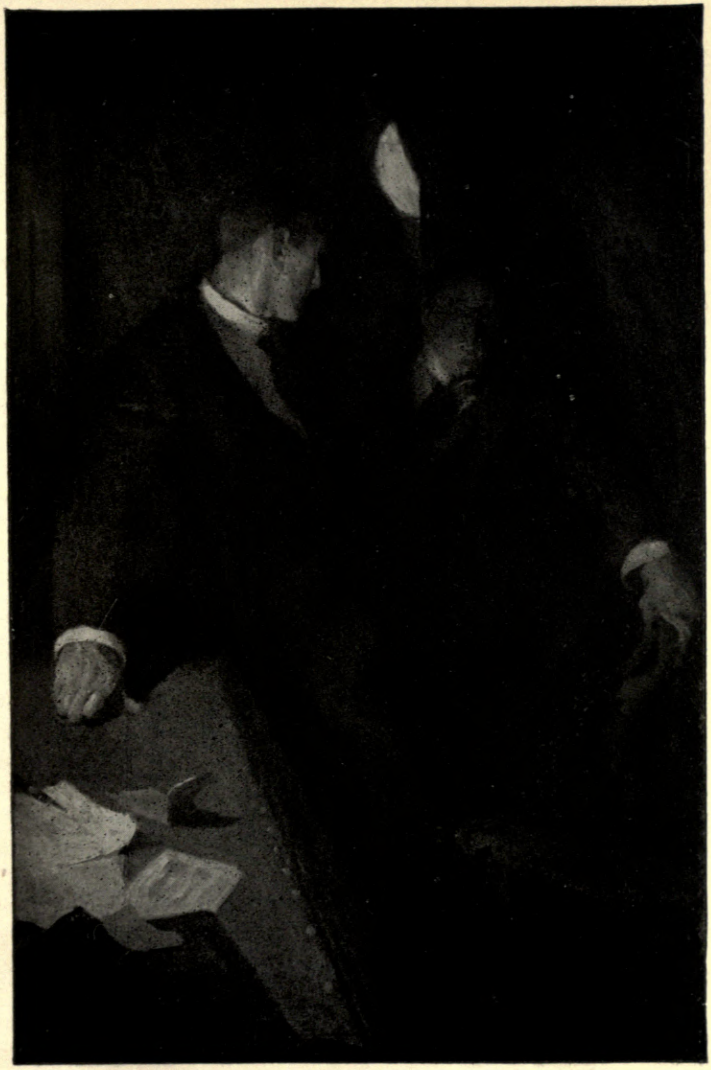
"You lie," he cried passionately. "I am no thief!"

The younger man's sudden heat was not without its effect upon Hendrie. A flush crept over his level brows. It dyed his cheeks, and added a fresh gleam of malignant hatred to the cold cruelty of his eyes. He drew a step nearer, and pointed at the chair.

"Sit down!" he commanded. And Frank found himself mechanically obeying.

After a moment's pause, Hendrie went on with a deliberation that contained an infinitely greater threat than any passionate outburst could have conveyed.

"You're a thief," he cried. "Do you get me? A thief. You're a low-down, dirty cur of a thief, not half as good as the man who steals money. Say, you're the sort of skunk who steals in through back doors chasing other men's womenfolk. You came to steal my wife. You've been at the game weeks. You've been watched—both of you—you and your paramour. Back!"



THE MAN LEAPED FROM HIS SEAT AND FACED ABOUT

In a wild fury Frank precipitated himself from his chair to choke the filthy accusations in the man's throat. But he was brought to a stand by the shining muzzle of a revolver, held at his body.

He dropped back to his chair.

"Say, you can quit that right here," Hendrie went on. "I'm ready for any play that way. You see, I fixed this trap for you. Guess I was wise to your being here. Say, you're going to pay for your gambol, my friend. Maybe you don't know what you're up against. You're going to pay—and pay bad. Maybe you don't know what my money can do. It can do a heap, and I'm ready to spend my last cent so you get the dose I want you to get.

"But you've made it easy for me. Plumb easy. I find you here with my safe open, and a pile of money taken from it. A safe robber, eh? The money in your hand, and you got in through this window. Get me? Burglary. House-breaking. Safe-robbing. When the law's fixed you right for that, and you've served your term—then, why, I guess there's more to follow. Say, you're going to get it good for just so long as we both live. I'm going to beat you down, down, down, till I've crushed you out of your rotten existence.

"Oh, I know you've not stolen that money," he went on savagely. "I know that. I recognize you for the man whose picture I tore up in my wife's rooms before I married her. You're her lover, I know, but you're going to be treated just as hard as the law can fix you for—those other things."

Under the merciless lash of the millionaire's tongue Frank grew steadily calmer. But it was the calm of despair. Full well he saw the hopelessness of his position. He had been trapped beyond all chance of escape, and even ill luck had worked for his undoing. As Hendrie paused he felt, though he knew denial was useless, that he must make a final effort.

"I tell you, you are wrong—utterly wrong," he cried desperately. "I have never stolen anything in my life. As for your wife, if you would only put this madness out of your head you would see that there is only one man in all the world she loves, and that man is you. Oh, I know it's useless to deny anything while you are in this state of mind. But it is as I say. You can do your worst with me. You

can employ your millions as you choose for my hurt, but I tell you the day will come when you will regret it, regret the wrong you are doing your wife—me, and would give your right hand to undo the mischief you have wrought through this—this insane jealousy."

The millionaire gazed at the earnest young face, and slowly a smile grew in his eyes, a smile which only rendered their expression more tigerish.

"Come," he said, in his level tones, "that's better. If what you say is true guess the whole thing's up to you. You'll have your opportunity in the prisoner's dock. Just explain things to the court, to the press reporters, waiting to telegraph the news all over America. Just tell 'em what your relations with the wife of Alexander Hendrie are. Call her a witness that she gave you that money. Do this. I'll be satisfied for you to do it. But remember when you get through with the court, you're not through with me."

He crossed the room and drew the curtains apart while Frank's desperate eyes followed his movements. There was no thought in the youngster's mind of anything but the absolute fiendishness in the man's final proposal. The heartless subtlety of it was tremendous.

Call his mother a witness! Call her a witness with a ravening horde of reporters gasping for scandal. He understood that Hendrie believed he would expose her to the shame of this liaison, and so punish her by such a process. He knew how little the man guessed the awakening such a course would in all probability bring him.

In that moment Frank saw more clearly than ever the necessity for silence and submission. But, realizing these things, he saw, too, an added danger.

"One moment," he said, with studied calmness. He had half read the other's intention as he moved the curtains. "What will happen when—Mrs. Hendrie hears of my conviction. Have you considered that?"

The millionaire glanced over his shoulder. A triumphant light shone in his eyes.

"Guess I've considered everything. Your—paramour—after to-night, will never see or hear of you again—unless you call her as a witness at your trial."

He waited for the anticipated outburst. But it did not

come. To his surprise his victim's face was smiling, and the sight of it set him searching for its cause.

Frank nodded.

"Right," he said, almost cheerily. "You can call your man. I have no intention to resist—now."

The next moment a man stepped into the room through the parted curtains. Frank surveyed him almost indifferently. He recognized him as Douglas, the Sheriff of Everton. It was a recognition that told him, had he needed to be told, that the millionaire's purpose was no "bluff."

His heart sank, but his determination remained unaltered. He thought of Phyllis, he thought of the farm he was to have purchased, he thought of a hundred and one things, and, though he gave no outward sign, he felt he could almost have wept.

Presently he was roused by their touch as the cold irons were slipped upon his wrists, and he heard Hendrie delivering his charge to the sheriff.

Then he found himself standing up. Somebody passed him his hat. Then he knew that he was walking beside the sheriff, and passing out of the room by the window through which he had entered it.

Alexander Hendrie gazed after the two retreating figures until the ground seemed to swallow them up as they dropped down to the lower level of the river-bank, where the trail for Everton ran along it. Then he turned back to the room.

He crossed swiftly to the safe and closed it. He thrust the packet of money into an inner pocket of his coat. Then he set the chair at the desk straight. After that he passed out through the window, carefully closing it behind him.

Ten minutes later a high-powered automobile was approaching Deep Willows by the Everton trail. It only had two occupants. The chauffeur was in the driving seat. Behind him, surrounded by his baggage, and enveloped in his heavy traveling coat, sat Alexander Hendrie.

CHAPTER XIX

THE RETURN OF ALEXANDER HENDRIE

"Guess he won't make home to-night, man."

Angus Moraine broke the silence which followed on the protracted, but absorbing discussion which had just taken place in the stuffy precincts of his office.

Monica smiled. She was sitting in a well-worn chair, Angus Moraine's own particular chair, which he had placed for her beside his desk in the full light of the lamp, and directly facing him.

"It's impossible to say," she replied, with the confidence of her understanding of the man under discussion. "If business does not interfere, and the mood takes him, Mr. Hendrie will be home to-night."

Her manner was delighted. She was feeling very happy. Such had been her interest in Angus's news, and the earnest discussion of affairs involved in her husband's letter to his manager, that, for the moment, all thought of Frank waiting for her in the library at the far end of the house had passed out of her head.

She had visited this man with no sort of feeling of friendliness, with nothing but resentment at the interruption, but the moment she entered the tobacco-laden atmosphere of his room, and glanced at the long letter which Angus promptly handed her, all her displeasure vanished, and she became fully interested.

Nor was the change to be wondered at. The letter was one which had been written with the express purpose of interesting her. It was not the brief, terse letter of a business man. Every word had been carefully considered. The writer's whole object had been to afford food for discussion, that his instructions to Angus, to keep her there for a definite time, might the more easily be carried out.

The paragraph which chiefly held her interest had been subtly placed by the writer at the opening of the letter.

> "There is a big labor movement afoot," he wrote. "It is normally the bonding of all agriculturalists, and has

for its stated purpose their protection against employers. This may be so. But I have a shrewd idea that the primary object is the furthering of the Socialistic movement that is causing so much harm to the world's industries, and is fostering the deplorable discontent prevailing in labor circles all the world over. However, with such a movement afoot, it is, of course, quite impossible to forecast what unpleasant developments the near future may have for us at Deep Willows.

"In removing you, and leaving Mrs. Hendrie in control of my interests there, I am confident enough of successful operation in the ordinary way. But under these new conditions I do not feel so sure. It seems to me that the necessity for the strength of a man's controlling hand in dealing with the situation will soon make itself apparent. Therefore it is better to anticipate. Such anticipation will cause a change of plans which, for some reasons, I reluctantly intend to make, and, for others, leaves me well enough satisfied.

"I shall, therefore, require you to remain at Deep Willows, and I will ask you to see Mrs. Hendrie at once, convey her my compliments, and urgently request her to join me in Winnipeg by the first east-bound mail. I must confess this change falls in with the present trend of my business as well as, I need hardly say, my personal inclinations. I find that affairs will keep me pretty well tied to Winnipeg and its surroundings, to say nothing of the tours I shall soon have to make from these headquarters. There is also a great deal to be done on the social side. It is becoming more and more necessary to entertain largely, and this, of course, I cannot do without my wife's co-operation. So, perhaps, all things considered, the change will turn out for the best.

"I am sorely pressed for time or I should have written Mrs. Hendrie fully on the subject. But, as this would have entailed two long letters of explanation, and since it is imperative to write you upon other matters relating to the work in hand, I must ask you to convey my apologies to my wife for thus sending her instructions through a third party. Any way, this letter is

only precautionary lest I should not be able to reach Deep Willows as I hope to."

Just for one moment, while reading, Monica had experienced the slightest feeling of pique that her husband should have chosen Angus as the recipient of his instructions for herself. But such smallness was quickly banished as she read on to the end of the letter, through a perfect maze of intricate orders and countermandings of affairs connected with Deep Willows. She realized that it would have been perfectly ridiculous to send this letter to her, and as he was "sorely pressed for time" the excuse was more than sufficient.

So she readily entered into the discussion which followed her reading of the letter. Even if he did not reach Deep Willows she was to rejoin her husband *permanently*, and this was far more to her taste than to work apart from him, even though she knew it was in his best interests.

In the discussion Angus surpassed himself for interest and amiability, and Monica found herself wondering how it was she had hitherto had such a dislike for him. Had she only known it the man was only carrying out secret instructions, which became all the more easy since the change of plans had left him free from the nightmare of leaving Deep Willows, which had pursued him for so many days.

Yes, Angus found it very pleasant, very easy talking to this brilliantly handsome woman, whose physical charms might well have found warmth in an iceberg. And, curiously enough, now that her husband was aware of what he believed to be the laxity of her morals, he no longer viewed them with so much resentment.

So pleasant did he make himself, so interesting in his wide knowledge of her husband's affairs, that Monica found herself talking on and on, with no thought of the rapidly passing time. She was utterly absorbed in the man whose life she shared, absorbed to the exclusion of all else—even the waiting Frank.

Now they were considering Hendrie's possible return that night. Angus had done his work, and was waiting, sitting there expectantly till the time of the final development which was yet to come.

"It'll need to be a 'special,' mam," he said, with a smile.

Monica laughed lightly.

"Then let it be a 'special.' That, and his automobile, will serve him well enough. You see——"

She broke off listening. Faintly, but quite distinctly, the low purr of a high-powered car penetrated the dense atmosphere of the office.

Angus started up. He, too, heard the sound, and he turned to the waiting woman.

"Guess it was a 'special' all right. Say——"

He broke off as his narrow eyes took in the expression of Monica's face. He ran to her side as though to support her.

"You're faint, mam!" he cried. "It's the heat of this room. It's——"

But Monica shook him off. Her face was deadly pale, and she stood supporting herself against the arm of her chair. Her eyes were alight with a dreadful alarm, as she gazed incredulously at the hands of the clock on the desk.

It was half-past one, and all this time Frank had been waiting in the library for her. The thought of her folly and carelessness was maddening. She would never, never forgive herself if harm came through it. Harm? It must not. She must get away at once. She must give him warning.

Then she remembered her companion. His sharp eyes were upon her. With a great effort she pulled herself together. It would be fatal for him to realize the truth of her feelings. She forced herself to a reassuring smile.

"It's nothing," she said, passing one hand wearily across her forehead. "Just the heat of the room."

Angus's face remained a picture of concern, and she was satisfied.

"I'll go and open the front door," she said, with studied calmness. "Everybody is in bed. I——"

Angus had turned to the door, and now opened it. In doing so Monica's attempt to leave the room was frustrated, for he raised a warning hand, and she found herself forced to listen as well.

Presently his eyes met hers.

"Guess you don't need to worry with that door," he said. "He's coming along over the upper trail. He'll pass us here."

So Monica had no alternative. She must remain. And this knowledge threw her into a fresh fever of apprehension. She searched for further excuse. But none was forthcoming. Her tumultuous brain refused to serve her, and, in a few moments, there came the ominous metallic clank as the clutch was released, and the breaks drew the millionaire's machine to a standstill at the door.

It was too late. Already her husband's voice could be heard talking to the chauffeur.

"Hand me that suit case and leave the rest in the car," he said. "You best get to bed, and be ready for an early start tomorrow."

There was nothing left for Monica but to go out and meet him.

In spite of her trouble it was good to see her husband again. But even while she listened to his greeting the thought whirled through her brain, had Frank heard his arrival, too? Had he made good his escape?

"Why, Mon, this is great. I hadn't expected it."

Hendrie spoke heartily. There was no mistaking the delight of his manner, and the troubled woman felt a thrill of satisfaction, even though danger was pressing.

"Gee, I've moved some to get here," he went on. Then he came up to her as she stood in the doorway, and, under the watchful eyes of Angus, embraced her warmly.

For a moment he stood her off at arm's length.

"But what are you doing up at this hour?" he demanded, with pretended severity. Then he turned to his manager with a laugh. "Keeping late hours with you, Angus, my friend? It won't do."

"You've got your own letter to blame for that, Alec," retorted Monica. "If you must send messages to your wife through Angus—you must expect the—unexpected." She laughed in spite of her anxiety.

Hendrie responded with a smile.

"Well, as long as he's told you everything I'll forgive him—this time. Say,"—he drew out his cigar case and carefully selected a cigar. His eyes were shadowed for a moment, and their expression was hidden from his wife—"will you be able to start East first thing to-morrow. It's—important."

There was emphasis in his last remark, and the eyes he raised to his wife's face were gently commanding.

Monica took him literally. She was only too glad to be able to fall in with his wishes.

"Why yes, dear," she said at once. "We can go on ahead, and Margaret can pack up and follow later. That will be quite easy."

The command died out of the man's eyes as he surveyed her. She was very, very beautiful as she stood there in the lamplight. Her fascination for him was enormous. Then her readiness to please him. No one but a man afflicted with his insane jealousy could have doubted her perfect, utter devotion to him.

But Hendrie was an unusual man. His extraordinary powers were so abnormally developed that perhaps there was a slight lack of balance. The driving force which urged him left him little margin for the more subtle understanding of human nature. He lived at fever heat. He had no desire to seek understanding through tolerance. It was for him to dominate. It was for him to bend, and even break, those who ran foul of his will.

"Splendid, Mon," he cried, as he pierced the end of his cigar and placed it firmly between his teeth. "You're always ready to help me. Splendid." His eyes shot a quick glance at Angus, who was standing watchfully by.

"Now see, Mon," he went on. "You best get right off to bed. It's devilish late, and you've got some journey in front of you. Just give me half an hour with Angus while I smoke this cigar and I'll join you."

Monica's heart leaped. Here was all she needed to dispel the last shadow. She could warn——

"Yes, I am tired, dear," she said readily. "It's been a long day, and I have been working hard."

Hendrie nodded.

"Sure you have."

"Still it doesn't matter," the simple woman went on. "There's lots and lots of work still before us. And Angus," she smiled over at the Scot playfully, "—well, I think he's really glad I'm going. Aren't you?"

Angus flushed. Then his eyes met the curious gleam in his employer's.

"I think it's best I stay, mam," he said guardedly. "If labor troubles get busy I'd say I'm the more fitted to deal with them."

"Of course you are." Monica was quite herself again, and she laughed as she picked up her husband's suit case. "I'll take this along for you, dear," she went on. "Good night, Angus. Good night, Alec—for the present."

She hurried out of the room, bearing the suit case in her hand, and, replying to her salutation, the two men stood watching her as she went.

The door closed.

For some moments Hendrie did not move. His great head was slightly inclined out of its usual erect position. Angus waited for him to speak. For himself he had nothing to say.

At last the cigar in the millionaire's mouth was tilted and he turned. He reached out and drew the chair Monica had occupied toward him. Then he sat down quite suddenly.

"Guess she'll find the library empty," he said, in a curiously dull tone. He crossed his legs and reached for a match. "He's well on his way to Calford—now," he added, without enthusiasm.

Angus nodded.

"They've got him?"

The millionaire did not answer. Nor did he display the least elation at the success of the trap he had laid and successfully worked.

Only the stony light of his eyes remained. If he had no elation it is doubtful that he possessed any feeling of a gentler nature. He had simply done what he had set out to do—done the thing he intended, as he always did. He rarely experienced any feeling of triumph in the working of his plans. That he possessed passionate human feelings there was little enough doubt. But these were quite apart from the scheming of his machine-like brain.

His cigar glowed under the pressure at which he was smoking, and this was the only indication Angus beheld of any unusual emotion.

The manager stirred uneasily at the lengthening silence.

"She tried to go—when you first came," he said hesitatingly.

Hendrie only nodded, and the quick glance of his eyes silenced any further attempt on the part of the other.

Angus watched him silently, and, as he watched, it almost seemed to him that somehow the man's great figure had shrunk. Maybe it was the way he was sitting, huddled in his chair. Certainly the old command of his personality seemed to have lessened, he looked older, and there was a curious, gray look about his face. He looked weary, an utterly tired man. Yes, if he could only have associated such a thing with Alexander Hendrie, he looked like—a beaten man.

But at last the silence was broken, and with it vanished the last sign which Angus had read so pessimistically in his employer. The great head was lifted alertly, and the steady eyes lit anew.

"Guess you don't know much about women, Angus," he said thoughtfully.

Angus shook his head.

"Don't want to," he replied coldly. "Guess I got all I need worrying out wheat."

The other accepted the denial, and went on—

"Maybe I don't know as much as I ought—at my age. Maybe we've both been too busy—worrying wheat."

Angus smiled coldly. But there was no smile in Hendrie's eyes. He was gazing steadily before him, his cigar poised, forgotten, in his hand. He had definitely addressed himself to Angus, but now he seemed to have forgotten his presence.

"Pshaw! What's the use?" he cried suddenly, with an irritable shift of his position. "It's not the woman's fault—ever. It's the man's—the dirty, low-down cur who can always trade on her weakness. I ought to know. By God! I ought to know."

He picked up a match almost mechanically and struck it. But his cigar remained where it was, and the match was allowed to burn out in his fingers. He threw the end of it away with a vicious movement.

Suddenly he looked up and caught his manager's eyes fixed on him curiously.

"What are you staring at, man?" he cried. Then with sudden heat, "What in hell are you staring at? Do you think me a doddering fool—a weak imbecile? That's it!"

he cried, working himself up into a sort of frenzy, and breaking into a laugh, as terrible a sound as Angus remembered to have heard. "I tell you she's not to blame," he went on furiously. "I tell you I'll not give her up. Say, you cold-blooded, herring-bodied Scotchman, have you ever loved a woman in the whole of your grouchy life?" Again he laughed. Again Angus felt the horror of it. "Never!" he went on furiously. "Never, never, never! Love? God, it's hell! Thank your God, you miserable, cold-blooded fish, you are incapable of loving any woman."

He reached out again for a match and struck it. But he threw it away from him at once.

"I can't give her up," he said, in a low, passionate tone. "I can win her back. I will win her back." His voice rose. "She is mine, and he—God have mercy on him, for I won't. Say, there's hell waiting for him. He'll be tried and condemned, and not a word of his trial will reach the outside world. He is utterly cut off from the world. I have seen to that. And then afterwards. By God, I'll hunt him down. I'll hunt him to his grave, if it costs me every cent I possess. Rob me? He would rob me of—my love? Love? It's the worst hell ever man blindly fell into, but—it's worth while."

Again he broke off, and his companion waited uneasily for what might yet come. He knew that for the moment something like madness had been turned loose in him. A passing madness, but still something to be dreaded.

He had not long to wait. All abruptly the gray eyes lit anew, and flashed in his direction.

"Why don't you say something?" he cried fiercely. "Why do you sit there in silence? Are you afraid to speak? Bah! Say, Angus, when you told me those things I promised you, if they were not true, I'd—kill you. You remember? They were true. And because they were true"—the man's eyes glowered—"I'd like—to kill you—anyway. Yes, I'd like to tear your miserable heart out of you, as you have helped to tear the heart out of me."

Angus offered no protest. He sat there still and watchful. He knew that the man's brain was fighting for sanity. Now had come the awful reaction. His purpose had been accomplished, the strain was over, and there was nothing left him

but the knowledge of his own terrible disaster. He felt that any ill-timed word of his might upset the balance. This man, who had proved victorious in a thousand battles in the arena of commerce, was now torn in conflict with his own soul. He must fight his battle alone. He must fight it to the end.

"God! If you'd help rob me of all the wealth I possess you could not have begun to hurt me as—as you have hurt me in this. All that I have, or am, is—in that woman's love. All that makes my life worth while is in her smile. Do you understand? No. Or you'd never have come to me with your miserable tale." His face was working. "You're all the same. You're all in the conspiracy. Oh, I could crush you, as well as the others, with these two hands. I could squeeze the wretched life out of you, and it would please me. Yes, it would please me."

Angus held his watchful attitude.

The man was breathing hard, and his usually cold eyes were burning. He shifted his position spasmodically.

Presently a deep sigh came from between his clenched teeth. Again he moved, but this time it was to cross his legs. Angus saw the movement, and, all unconsciously, he sighed, too. He understood the relaxing of tension which permitted such a movement. Was the end near? Had the battle worn itself out? Had the man emerged victorious?

Suddenly Hendrie turned to the cigar, still poised between his fingers. He smiled. And Angus knew that victory was within sight. A match was again struck, and this time the millionaire lit his cigar. The next moment his companion beheld a glimpse of the suffering heart so deeply hidden in that broad bosom.

"I'm—I'm sorry, old friend," Hendrie said, with an unusual note of genuine kindness in his voice. "I'm sorry. Guess I said a whole heap of rotten stuff to you. Maybe you'll forget. Maybe you understand something of what I'm feeling about now. You see—I—just love her, and, well—I just love her."

CHAPTER XX

THE VERDICT

THE machinery at the command of Alexander Hendrie had been set in motion. Nor was its power in doubt for a single moment. Wealth may not be able to bias the ruling of a court, but it can do all those things which can force conviction upon the mind of the most upright judge on the bench. It's subtle working in the hands of men who live by corruption is more powerful than, perhaps, the ordinary mind would believe. No innocence is sufficient that its victim need not fear for liberty—even for life itself.

Frank Burton, charged in Calford as Frank Smith, a name which, to the last, he claimed for his own, was soon enough to learn something of this extraordinary, intangible power. To his horror he found himself utterly powerless before an array of evidence which conveyed a cruelly complete story of his alleged malefactions, characterized as house-breaking—with violence. Some of the witnesses against him were men whom he had never seen or heard of, and strangely enough, Alexander Hendrie did not appear against him. The charge was made by Angus Moraine.

For his defence he had only his absurdly bare declaration of innocence, a declaration made from the passionate depths of an innocent heart, but one which, in the eyes of the court, amounted to nothing more than the prerogative of the vilest criminal.

What use to fight? His counsel, the counsel appointed by the court, did his conscientious best, but he knew he was fighting a losing battle. There was no hope from the outset, and he knew it. However, he had his fee to earn, and he earned it to the complete satisfaction of his conscience.

In view of his client's declaration of absolute innocence this worthy man endeavored to drag from him a plausible explanation of his presence at Deep Willows, with the money taken from the open safe in his possession. But on this point Frank remained obstinately silent. He had no ex-

planation to offer. His mother's honor was more to him than his liberty—more to him than his life. So the mockery of justice went on to the end.

In the meantime Alexander Hendrie was no nearer the scene of persecution than Winnipeg, but the six hundred odd miles was bridged by telephone wires, and he was in constant touch with those whose service was at his command.

The completeness with which the last details of his plans were executed was at once a tribute to his consummate manipulation, and the merciless quality of his hatred. The cruelty he displayed must have been indefensible except for that one touch of human—nay, animal nature, which belongs to all life. He honestly believed in this man's guilty relations with his own wife, and his blindly furious jealousy thus inspired he saw no penalty, no vengeance too cruel or too lasting to deal out to the offender.

Alexander Hendrie had no scruples when dealing with his enemies. His was the merciless fighting nature of the brute. But he was also capable of prodigal generosities, lofty passions, and great depths of human gentleness.

No feeling of pity stirred him as he sat in his office in Winnipeg, with the telephone close to his hand, on the afternoon of his victim's trial.

He was waiting for the news of the verdict which was to reach him over those hundreds of miles of silent wire. He was waiting patiently, but absorbed in his desire that word should reach him at the earliest moment. His desk was littered with business papers which required his attention, but they remained untouched. It was an acknowledgment that paramount in the man's mind is passionate feeling for the woman he had married.

It was a strange metamorphosis in a man of his long-cultivated purpose. All his life success had been his most passionate desire. Now he almost regarded his millions with contempt. Nature had claimed him at last, and the lateness of her call had only increased the force and peremptoriness of her demands.

Even now, while he waited, his thoughts were in that up-town mansion where Monica was waiting for him. Nor were they the harsh thoughts of the wronged husband for

the woman in whom his faith had been shattered. He was thinking of her as the wonderful creature, so fair, so perfect in form, so delightful in the appeal of her whole personality, around whom shone the deepest, most glowing fires of his hopes. She was to him the fairest of all God's creatures; she was to him the most desirable thing in all the world.

The fierce tempest which had so bitterly raged in his soul at the first discovery of her frailty had abated, it had almost worn itself out. Now he had taken the wreckage and deliberately set it behind him, and once more the flame of his passion had leaped up—fanned by the breath of the strong life which was his.

Another might have cast the woman out of his life; another of lesser caliber. This man might have turned and rent her, as he had turned and rent the man who was her secret lover. But such was not Alexander Hendrie. His passions were part of him, uncontrolled by any lukewarm considerations of right and wrong. To love, with him, was to hurl aside all caution, all deliberation, and yield himself up to it, body and soul. To have cast Monica out of his life must have been to tear the heart from the depths of his bosom.

The time crept on, and still the telephone remained silent. But the waiting man's patience seemed inexhaustible. His was the patience of certainty. So he smoked on in his leisurely fashion, dreaming his dreams in the delicate spirals of fragrant smoke which rose upon the still air of the room to the clouded ceiling above.

He had no thought for the innocent young life he was crushing with the power of his wealth so many miles away. He cared not one jot for the ethics of his merciless actions. His thwarted love for his erring wife filled all his dreams to the exclusion of every other consideration.

A secretary entered and silently left some papers upon his desk. He retired voicelessly to wonder what fresh manipulation in the wheat world his employer was contemplating.

A junior entered with several telegrams. They, too, were silently deposited, and he vanished again to some distant corners of the offices.

Still Hendrie dreamed on, and still the telephone had no word to impart. His cigar was burning low. The aroma

of its leaf was less delicate. Perhaps it was the latter that broke in on his dreaming, perhaps it was something else. He stirred at last, and dropped the lighted stump into a cuspidor, and thrust his chair back.

At that moment the bur-r-r of the telephone's dummy bell broke the silence. Without haste, without a sign of emotion he drew his chair forward again, and leisurely placed the receiver to his ear.

"Yes—Who's that?—oh!—Calford." Hendrie waited a moment, the fingers of his right hand drumming idly on his desk. Presently he went on: "Yes, yes—you are Calford. Who is it speaking?—Eh?—That you, Angus? Damn these long-distance 'phones, they're so indistinct!—Yes. This is Hendrie speaking. Well?—Oh. Finished, is it?—Yes. And?—oh—splendid. Five years—Good—Five years penitentiary. Excellent. Thanks. Good-bye."

He replaced the receiver and quietly began to deal with the accumulation of work which had lain so long untouched upon his desk.

PART III

CHAPTER I

THE MARCH OF TIME

In the rush of new life in Winnipeg, Monica was left with little enough time for anything but those duties which, in her husband's interests, were demanded of her. A fresh vista of life's panorama had opened out before her, making it necessary to obtain a definite readjustment of focus.

She quickly found herself tossed about amid the rapids of the social stream, and, however little the buffeting of its wayward currents appealed to her, hers was a nature not likely to shrink before it. It was her duty, as the wife of one of the richest men in the country, to make herself one of the pivots about which revolved a narrow, exclusive social circle, and toward that end she strove with her greatest might.

But the life was certainly not of her choosing. For her its glamor had no appeals. She regarded it as a splendid show, built upon the sands of insincerity, hypocrisy, self-indulgence, vulgarity, all of which were far enough removed from her true nature.

However, she was not without her compensation. She felt she was an important spoke in the wheel of fortune her husband was spinning, and, for his sake, she was glad to endure the slavery.

So, in her great mansion, in the most exclusive portion of the city, she dispensed lavish and tasteful hospitality; and, in turn, took part in all the functions that went to make up the program of the set in which she found herself something more than an ordinary star. Within three months her popularity was achieved, and in six she was voted the most brilliant hostess in the city.

She spared herself not at all. All her tact, her discretion, her mentality were exerted in the service of the man she loved, who, watching her uncomplaining efforts, saw that they were good. Whatever her feelings and longings for the peace of the golden plains of Deep Willows, her reward lay in the quiet acknowledgment, the smiling approval and

systematic devotion of the man whose slave she was only too willing to be.

It would all end some day, she knew. Some day, her husband's work completed, she would find herself at his side, shoulder to shoulder, hand clasped in hand, supported always by his strong affection, completing their little journey through life in the proud knowledge that the work they had set themselves was well and truly done.

Hendrie's satisfaction with her was very apparent. Whatever his secret thoughts and feelings, whatever his bitterness of memory, no sign of these was permitted to escape him. She moved through his life an idol. She was something in the nature of a religion which reduced him to the verge of fanaticism.

Thus Monica was absorbed during her first six months of Winnipeg. But in her moments of respite her thoughts more than frequently drifted in the direction of young Frank, and the girl he was to make his wife.

At first she recalled with satisfaction the fact that she had been able to help him, and she found herself building many castles for his occupation. Then, as the time slipped by, she began to wonder at his silence. There was no sense of alarm. She just wondered, and went on with her pictures of his future. She thought of the new home she had helped him select, and saw him in its midst, preparing it for the reception of the young wife he was so soon to take to his bosom.

Frank married! It seemed so strange. The thought carried her happily back to the picture of a blue-eyed, crumpled-faced baby as it had looked up from its cot with that meaningless stare, so helpless, yet so ravishing to the mother instinct. It seemed absurd to think of Frank married. And yet——

Why had he not written? She was puzzled.

At first her puzzlement was merely passing, as other important matters drove it from her thoughts. But, as the days passed without any word, it recurred with greater and greater frequency. Gradually a subtle worry set in, a worry both undermining and harassing. Then she seriously began to consider the puzzle of it, and, in a moment, genuine alarm took hold of her.

She reviewed the night of her husband's sudden return to Deep Willows. She remembered how, immediately on leaving Angus's office, she had gone straight to her library. It was empty. The safe was locked; all was in order. Even the window was closed. All this told her what she wanted to know. Frank had taken his departure safely. The final touch of the window remaining unfastened, pointed the fact that he had closed it after him.

Yes, he was safely away. Of that there was no doubt in her mind. Then, why this silence? Could an accident have occurred? Could he be ill? It did not seem likely. In either case he would have let her know. Could he be——? No, she thrust the thought of his death aside as too horrible to contemplate.

Then she thought of the money. It was a large sum. Had he been robbed? It was a possibility, but one that did not carry conviction. It was not likely, she told herself. Knowing him as she did it seemed impossible. No one knew of his possession, and he was not likely to proclaim it. He was quite cautious, and, besides, he knew the people he was likely to find himself among.

At length she wrote to him. This was about three months after her arrival in Winnipeg. She wrote him at the farm where he had worked, feeling that the letter would be forwarded on if he had left the place.

Days passed; two weeks. There was no reply to her letter, and her fears increased. A month later she wrote again, this time addressing the letter to his new farm. The result was the same. His silence remained unbroken.

Then came a shock which reduced her to a condition of panic. Her first letter was returned to her through the mail, and the envelope bore the ominous blue pencil message, "not known." A few days later her second letter came back with similar words.

The return of the second letter had a curious effect upon Monica. For a long time she found herself unable to think clearly upon the matter. Her panic seemed to have paralyzed her capacity for clear thought, and she was left helplessly dreading.

The truth was she had no one to whom she could open her heart. No one to whom she could confide, and with

whom she could discuss the situation. So she was left with an awful dread weighing her down. Something had happened to the boy, something dreadful. And she dared not, even in thought, admit the nature of her fears.

Nor was her trouble without its outward, physical effect. Sleepless nights and anxiety rapidly began to leave their mark. She became nervous and irritable. Her beautiful rounded cheeks lost something of their delicate beauty. Her eyes grew shadowed, and the nervous strain left blood-shot markings in the pearly whiteness of her eyes. Her faithful Margaret was quick to perceive these signs. But in her ignorance of the real facts she read them as due to the constant drain of her mistress's social duties upon a system unused to such a life.

"Madam must rest," she assured her charge, as the latter sat before her mirror, while the girl's deft fingers prepared her hair for Mrs. Lionel K. Horsley's ice carnival at the great skating rink. "Madam will be a ghost of herself soon. She will be so—so ill."

But "madam" had no reply for the girl's well-meant warning. She sat silently studying her reflection in the mirror for many minutes.

The result of that study was a sudden determination to do something by which she might hope to stay these inroads. Her resolve took the form of a desire for action. She must set her doubts at rest. She must find out definitely the actual reason of her boy's silence.

So once more she set herself to study the dreary list of possibilities. It was a hopeless, blind sort of groping, and led nowhither. Nor was it until some days had passed that her inspiration really came. It came in the middle of a long, sleepless night, and she only marveled that she had not thought of it before. If there was one person in the world likely to know of Frank's whereabouts it was Phyllis Raysun. Why had she not thought of it before?

Forthwith she left her bed and wrote a letter. Nor did the possible consequences of what she was doing occur to her until she had sealed the envelope. Then realization came sharply enough. She remembered Phyllis's unusual keenness. Who was she, Monica, to require information about Frank? What relationship was there between them?

The girl was aware of Frank's illegitimacy. Well? Yes, she would guess the secret she, Monica, had been at such pains to keep.

On the impulse of the moment she tore the letter up. But, almost immediately, she wrote another. The second was shorter. It was more formal, too, and she left out of it all excuse for requiring the information. Phyllis must guess, if she chose. If she guessed, when she answered, she, Monica, would tell her the truth of her relationship to Frank, or, at least, the story she had told Frank himself. It would be the best course to take—the only course she could see.

With the letter written she enjoyed the first real night's sleep she had had for many days. She felt better. She felt she was on the right track, and now, at last, was actively moving to clear up the mystery which had robbed her of so much peace of mind.

She mailed the letter herself next morning, and then prepared to await the result with what patience she could.

In due course her answer arrived. It came in the shape of a cheap envelope bulging to its capacity. For a moment Monica's excitement was almost painful. Perhaps it contained the long-awaited letter from Frank himself. Perhaps, through some mischance, he had been away, and unable to write her before. Perhaps all her fears had been unnecessary.

She tore off the outer covering. But the first paragraph written in a girlish hand, dashed every hope, and plunged her to the depths of despair.

Monica read the letter to the end—the bitter, bitter end—and she read the simple story of a heartbroken girl, who, like herself, had been waiting, waiting for word from the man who was her whole world. She had no news of him whatsoever. She knew nothing of his whereabouts. She could find no trace of him. He had vanished. He had gone out of her life without a word. From the moment he had left Gleber to visit his mother, nothing had been seen of him by any one in the vicinity of the farm upon which he had been working.

Not one doubt of the man himself did the girl express. She was convinced that some terrible accident had befallen. Death alone, she declared, would have kept him from her, and in this belief her grief left her overwhelmed. Monica's

tears fell fast as she read the letter. They were tears for the child who had written it, tears for herself, tears for the unhappy boy whom she looked upon and loved as a son.

But the appeal of the girl's story had another effect upon her. It stiffened her courage, and, for some strang reason, left her utterly unconvinced of the rightness of the surmise the letter contained. Frank was not dead, she told herself, and the denial came from her heart rather than her head.

From that moment a definite change became very marked in Monica. All her old keenness and aptitude for business returned to her aid. No stone should be left unturned to discover the boy, whatever it cost her. Grown to manhood as he was, he was still her charge, bound to her by the ties of her duty to the dead, bound to her by the tie of a wonderful maternal love. She steeled herself to face every possibility. She flinched at no consequence to herself. If she searched the world to its ends, Frank should be found.

Her plans were quickly made. In her emergency they required less thought than had been necessary in the midst of her doubts. With Frank definitely lost, the matter resolved itself into a question of dollars. Dollars? She had them. She had them in unlimited quantities, and they should be poured out like water.

She promptly engaged the services of the best detectives in the country, and set them to work. In their supreme confidence they promised her that if the man was above ground they would find him. If he were not, then they would at least point the spot at which he was buried.

Monica was satisfied, and the long weeks of waiting for news began. She wrote a warm, womanly letter of great kindness to Phyllis, and told her what she was doing. She also told her the story of Frank's birth as she had told it to the boy himself. She promised her, among many other encouragements, that she would wire her news as soon as it reached her.

For herself she was quite desperate, and weighed none of the possible consequences, should word of what she was doing reach her husband. She was content to await such consequences and deal with them as they presented themselves. It was the mother-love in her at war with her love for her husband, and, somehow, the former, for the time, at least,

seemed to possess the stronger hold upon her. At that moment, no sacrifice was too great for her to make.

But, for all the confidence expressed by the men she had employed, weeks grew into months, and a year passed since Frank's disappearance, and she was still waiting for news of him. Her patience was sorely taxed, and a great grief and melancholy settled down upon her. Her agents still remained optimistic, and with difficulty persuaded her from employing additional aid.

The ice having been broken, she kept in constant communication with Phyllis, and the intercourse helped her to endure the dreary waiting, as it helped the lonely girl so many miles away. It was a solace, however meager, to both, and it served to save them from the crushing effects of a burden which threatened to overwhelm them both.

Once, in a fit of depression, Monica made up her mind to abandon Winnipeg and return to Deep Willows. She had no very definite reason for the change. It might have been that she wanted to return to the place where she had last seen her boy. It may have been that she wanted to be within reach of Phyllis, the only person to whom she could open her troubled heart. Then, too, perhaps her presence would help the girl, whom, in her own trouble, Monica had come to look upon with something more than friendliness.

She told her husband of her purpose one night on their way to dinner at the house of Joseph P. Lachlan, a great railroad magnate.

Hendrie expressed no surprise, but appeared to display the keenest sympathy.

"You've done great work, Mon," he said cordially. "I don't know how I should have got through without your help on the social side. You're a bully partner. You've never grumbled. And yet you must be worn out. It's been worrying me lately. I've seen how all this is telling on you. Ye—s. You certainly must have a holiday. I hope to be finished soon. Then I shall be able to join you. But there are one or two matters I can't leave yet. I hope to bring off a big coup the night of our big reception, a month hence. You see, Cyrus Burd, the New York banker, must be brought into the trust. The whole thing is a question of overwhelming capital to carry on the fight against the

market when we declare ourselves. And Burd is the man—the last man we want. I dare say I can worry that reception through without you. I shall have to. Anyway your health is the first consideration with me, and Deep Willows is just the place for you to recuperate in."

Instantly Monica's denial leaped. Her health was nothing to his affairs, she said. A month more or less would make no difference to her. There must be no chance of anything going wrong through her defection. She would not leave Winnipeg till after that reception.

Then Hendrie tried to persuade her to go. But her mind, she declared, was definitely made up, and she was quite immovable. So Hendrie, with an air of reluctance, was finally forced to acquiesce.

"If you insist, Mon, I have nothing more to say," he said, with a sigh. "At least when it is over, we'll take a long rest. We'll visit Europe and spend a lazy month or so."

Monica was clay in his hands. The last place he wanted her to visit was Deep Willows—yet.

She had reason to be glad of her decision two weeks later. It was nearly noon one morning when her private telephone at the side of her bed rang. She was sipping her morning coffee. The rolls on her plate were as yet untouched. Margaret was occupied in preparing for her mistress's toilet. The girl promptly left her work and took up the receiver, while Monica waited to hear who it was ringing her up.

"Who is it? the girl inquired. "I can't hear. Red——"

Monica spoke sharply.

"Give me the thing," she said. "You never could hear over a 'phone."

The girl obeyed, and left the room, as was her rule when Monica used the telephone.

It was the Redtown Inquiry Agency, and Monica's heart leaped as she listened. Their representative wanted to see her urgently. Would she call upon him before two o'clock? It was preferable she should go to him. Would she kindly do so? He could not trust a message of importance to the wire.

It was just one o'clock when Monica was ushered into the private office of Mr. Verdant, the representative of the Red town Agency.

Mr. Verdant greeted her with the cordiality he always displayed toward a rich client. After placing her in a chair, where the light from the window shone full upon her face, he moved noiselessly over to the door, and, with some display, ascertained that it was tightly shut. Then, as noiselessly, he returned to his desk, dropped into his swing chair, adjusted his glasses, and gazed squarely into his visitor's face.

Having satisfactorily staged himself, and conveyed to the anxious woman that he was reading her like an open book, he drew a memorandum pad toward him and spoke without looking up.

"We have not found your—the person you are interested in, Mrs. Hendrie," he said, with studied effect.

"You have not found him?" Monica's heart sank. Then she went on in an aggrieved tone. "Then—then why have you sent for me? You said it was urgent."

The man looked up. It was a keen face he turned toward his client. He was a clever detective, but he was also a shrewd business man.

"Just so, madam," he said. It is urgent. I have brought you here to tell you that my people have decided to abandon the case."

Monica stared.

"But—but I don't understand."

"Precisely, madam, and I am here to explain."

"Please explain—and quickly. I have no time to waste."

Monica was angry. She was grievously disappointed, too. All the way down Main Street she had buoyed herself with the belief that her boy had at last been found.

"I'm sorry, mam," Mr. Verdant went on, "but we're business men as well as inquiry agents. Maybe we're business men first. You'll naturally understand that our inquiries frequently lead us into strange places, also they frequently land us up against people whom, as business men, we cannot afford to—vulgarly speaking—run up against. This is our position now with regard to your—er—inquiries."

"You mean—you are afraid to go on with my case?" Monica made no attempt to conceal her annoyance, even contempt.

"You can put it that way if you choose," Mr. Verdant went on imperturbably. "The point is that as inquiry agents I regret to say my chiefs have decided to abandon the case, and, in my capacity as their representative, it is my duty to notify you personally."

"But this is outrageous," cried Monica, suddenly giving full vent to angry disappointment. "I pay you. Whatever you ask I am willing to pay. And you coolly, without any explanation, refuse to continue the case. It—is a scandalous outrage!"

Her flushed face and sparkling eyes told the detective more plainly than her words the state of mind his ultimatum had thrown her into. He assumed at once a more conciliatory tone.

"Madam," he said, "you are just a little hard upon us. There are some things far better left alone, and, in this case, it is 'explanation.' The fact that this is so should tell you that we have been by no means idle. We have simply gone as far as we dare in our investigations."

But Monica was not so easily appeased.

"If you have done the work you say; if you have made discoveries which you refuse to disclose to me, after accepting my money for your work, then you are committing a fraud which the law will not tolerate."

Mr. Verdant listened quite unimpressed.

"One moment, madam. I beg of you to keep calm. I have done my duty as an official of this agency. Now I am going to do my duty by you, as the detective in charge of your case. You desire to know the whereabouts of Mr. Frank Burton. I can tell you how to find his whereabouts—in half an hour."

"But you said you had not found him!"

Monica was beginning to wonder if the man were not a lunatic as well as a fraud.

"I have not found him."

"Then—gracious, man, speak out. How can I find him?"

"Ask your husband. Ask Mr. Alexander Hendrie where he is."

Mr. Verdant had risen from his seat as he spoke, and now stood holding the door open for his visitor to pass out.

CHAPTER II

WHEN VOWS MUST YIELD

"Ask your husband. Ask Mr. Alexander Hendrie where he is."

The words beat into Monica's brain. They hammered upon her ear-drums. They rose before her eyes, mocking her.

She was back in her own home. She had gone straight to her bedroom and locked herself in. She was due at a luncheon party, and, on her return, Margaret had hurried to wait upon her. But the girl was promptly dismissed, and the luncheon forgotten. It was a matter of no importance now. Monica would go nowhere; she would receive no one. She was ill, she said, and refused to be disturbed.

So Margaret was left wondering and frightened.

Monica paced her room for hours. She was vainly endeavoring to think connectedly. She was trying desperately to fathom the meaning of the man Verdant's challenge. It was useless. All continuity of thought was gone. Her ideas, her thoughts just tumbled pell-mell through her harassed brain, eluded her grasp, and vanished in the darkness whence they had leaped.

"Ask your husband. Ask Mr. Alexander Hendrie where he is."

"It was maddening; and fever coursed through her veins. Her head grew hot with her effort. It ached, as did her eyes. Things about her began to seem unreal. Even the familiar objects in the room seemed to belong to some long-past, almost forgotten period in her life. She pulled herself together, and even began to question herself. Where was she? Ah, yes, this was her husband's house——

"Ask your husband."

For a moment the fever left her cold. Then it was on her again. She must ask her husband!

A hundred times the words came back, but she could proceed no further. Instinctively she understood something of the ugliness lying beyond them.

The distraught woman endured this torture for hours. It seemed ages; and at times she believed she was struggling to keep her reason.

If her husband knew of Frank's whereabouts, then—but she dared go no further. Once she paused in her restless pacing and stood before the mirror on her dressing-table. She stared at it as though reading the man's words written there. Suddenly she became aware of her own reflection, which seemed to be mocking her. She fled precipitately and flung herself into a chair, burying her face in her hands.

But such a state of mind could not endure and sanity remain. It was the result of shock, and the worst of shocks must give way before the recuperative powers of healthy nature. So it was now.

The late afternoon sun had just fallen athwart the great bay window, when the troubled woman, with a sigh as of utter exhaustion, flung herself upon her bed in a flood of hysterical tears. For a while the storm remained unabating. It almost seemed that the flood-gates of a broken heart had been opened; as though life had no longer any joy remaining; as though all the most treasured possessions of her woman's heart had been ruthlessly torn from her bosom, so hopeless, so dreadful were her tears.

But it was the saving reaction. Within half an hour the storm had lessened. Then, as suddenly as it had begun, it ceased altogether.

Monica sat up.

For one painful moment she gazed stupidly about her. Then one by one the details of her room grew upon her, and, slowly, a subtle change crept into her eyes. For a moment they hardened, as though she were spurring herself to some painful resolve. Then, at last, they softened again to their natural expression. She left her bed, and passed through the doorway which led into her private bathroom.

Presently she emerged. A cold douche had done its work. She was quite calm now, and all her movements became deliberate. She walked up to her mirror, and gazed at the reflection of her swollen eyes. Then, with a weary sigh, she finally turned away and pushed the electric bell at her bedside.

Margaret obeyed the summons with suspicious alacrity.

Truth to tell the devoted girl had been near by, waiting for the summons. Her mistress's unusual attitude had seriously troubled her. Now she came, hoping but anxious, and, after one glance at Monica's swollen eyes she gave vent to her distress.

"Oh, but, madam——" she cried.

She was silenced with a look.

"I'll begin to dress—now," Monica said coldly.

But the girl's anxiety was too sincere.

"But, madam, it is only half-past five! Dinner—dinner is at eight."

Monica turned away coldly, and seated herself upon the ottoman, which stood in the center of the room.

"I will dress now," she said finally.

Margaret understood her charge. It was useless to protest when Monica's mind was made up. So she set about her work at once.

Monica watched her as she threw open the wardrobes. Her eyes followed her as she vanished to prepare the bath. But it was not with any interest. The girl's movements simply conveyed a sense of activity to her. That was all. But it helped her. It helped her, in the midst of her teeming thought, as nothing else could have done.

She endured the process of her toilet like one in a dream. Nor was it until it came to the necessary selection of a gown that she displayed any real interest. Then she roused herself and startled Margaret with her peevish indecision. Nothing seemed to please her. Several new gowns, just home from the extravagant costumer, who poured "creations" upon her, were flung ruthlessly aside before the girl's dismayed eyes. She would have none of them, and Margaret was at her wit's end.

There were only a few simple black gowns left, and Margaret hated black. But what was she to do? She produced them, being careful, at the same time, to display her own disapproval. Promptly selection was made. Monica knew the value of soft black chiffon against her beautiful fair hair and fairer skin. No one knew it better.

Another uncomfortable half hour was spent while the girl dressed her mistress's hair. Never had Monica been so

difficult to please. But even this was finally satisfactorily achieved, and Margaret sighed her relief.

However, her surprises were not yet done with. There was still another forthcoming. Monica surveyed herself in the mirror. She gazed at herself from every point of view. She beheld a perfectly molded figure, unusually tall, with the delicious tint of flesh like alabaster glowing warmly through the gauzy folds of the simple black chiffon of which her gown was composed. She saw a face that was slightly pale, but of exquisite, mature beauty. She saw eyes of a deep blue, full of warmth, full of that precious suggestion of passionate possibilities which no man can witness unmoved. And even in those moments of trouble she knew that she had done well in her choice of gowns. She knew that she was very beautiful.

She turned at last to the waiting girl, who was gazing at her in open admiration.

"Go and find out if Mr. Hendrie has come in yet. If he hasn't, leave word I am to be told the moment he arrives. Also, let him be told that I wish to see him in the library before he goes to dress."

The girl moved toward the door.

"One moment." Monica spoke over her shoulder. "Put the rouge out for me, and—an eye pencil."

This final order was too much for the girl's sense of the beautiful.

"But, madam," she cried. "Oh, madam is too beautiful for——"

"Do as I tell you!"

The order came sharply, almost harshly, and Margaret hastened to obey. For once Monica was stirred out of her customary kindliness. Her nerves were on edge. She had yet to face an ordeal, which, with each passing moment, was slowly sapping her courage. She knew she had none to spare, and dreaded lest her strength should fail her at the last.

Monica was standing in the archway beyond which two great French windows looked out over the street. One beautiful, rounded arm was upraised, and its bejeweled hand was nervously clutching the edge of the heavy crimson curtain.

It was no pose. She was clinging to the curtain for support.

It was still daylight. The setting sun still lit the street outside. The room was lined from its polished floor to the ceiling with dark mahogany bookcases, which, with the crimson hangings, and the deep-toned Turkey carpet, helped to soften the light to a suggestion of evening.

The sound of a step in the hall beyond startled her. She clutched the curtain still more tightly. She knew that firm tread. The handle of the door turned. Instantly she yielded her hold upon the curtain. Her husband must witness no sign of her fear. The next moment a deep, familiar voice greeted her.

"I'm sorry if I kept you waiting, Mon. I——"

Hendrie broke off in astonishment. Just for a moment his eyes surveyed the wonderful picture she made. And, in that moment, Monica realized that her efforts had not been in vain. His eyes were drinking in her beauty, and she understood that never, in their brief married life, had she appealed to him more.

"Why, Mon," he cried. Then in a sudden burst of admiration. "You—you look just splendid." And after a pause. "Splendid!"

Monica smiled up at him.

"You haven't kept me waiting. I—I was anxious to see you at once, so I—I dressed early."

Hendrie had drawn nearer, as though about to embrace her. But her halting fashion of explanation checked him. All unconsciously he leaned against the edge of a table instead. It was as though something had warned him to—wait.

"I'm glad I didn't keep you waiting," he said, and something of the warmth had gone out of his tone. "Something —important?"

The woman was seized with a man longing to flee from the room. The ordeal she was about to go through was almost more than she could bear.

"Yes—I'm afraid it is," she said, in a low, unsteady voice, while she turned away toward the window.

"Afraid?"

Monica turned again and looked up into his eyes. A sudden weakness left her knees shaking.

"Yes," she said, and stammered on. "I—I—hardly know where—to—begin."

Hendrie left the table and drew a step nearer.

"You're in some trouble, my Mon," he said kindly. "I can see it in your face. Tell me, dear."

His words had their effect. Monica's fears lessened, and something of her courage returned. Suddenly she threw up her head.

"No, no! You tell me, Alec!" she cried. "Tell me truly, as though you were answering your own soul, is there—is there a condition, a moment, a situation in life when it becomes wrong to keep a solemn vow given—to the dead? I hold that a vow to the dead is the most sacred thing in—life. Am I right—or wrong?"

The man's gray eyes expressed neither surprise nor curiosity. They were calmly considering, and in their calm they were painfully cold.

He shook his head.

"You are wrong," he said simply. "The most sacred thing in life is—Truth. When Truth demands, no vow to dead or living can bind."

Monica sighed.

"You are sure?"

"Sure. Quite sure."

The man was deliberate. As no answer was forthcoming, he went on—

"Come, Mon, tell me. Guess there's something behind all this. Well—I am here to listen."

The woman stirred. She clenched her hands. Then her answer came.

"And I am here to tell you," she cried, with a sharp intake of breath. "I have lost something. I have lost something which is almost as precious to me as—as your love. I have been told that you can tell me where to find—him."

"Him?" The word rang through the quiet room.

It was the man's only comment, and a dreadful inflection was laid upon the word.

There are moments in life when acts are performed, when words are spoken without thought, even without actual impulse of our own. They are, perhaps, moments when Fate steps in to guide us into the path she would have us tread.

Perhaps it was such a moment in Monica's life, in Hendrie's.

Certainly the woman had spoken without thought. She had no understanding of what her words could possibly mean to her husband. And Hendrie, surely he was unaware that murder looked out of his furious gray eyes at what he believed to be the mention of the man for whose downfall he had perjured his own soul.

"Yes—him, him!" cried Monica, becoming hysterical. "My—my dead sister's child."

Hendrie recovered himself at once. He smoothed back his hair like a man at a loss.

"I—don't think I quite—get it," he said slowly. Then his bushy brows lifted questioningly. "Your sister's child? I didn't know you had a sister. You never told me. Say—how should I know where this child is?"

He was puzzled. Yet he was not without some doubts.

Monica swallowed with difficulty. Her throat and tongue were parched.

"No," she said, struggling for calmness. "I never told you because—because I had vowed to keep the secret. Questions would have followed the telling, which I could not have answered. I was bound—bound, and I could not break my promise."

"You best tell me all there is to tell," the man said coldly. "This secrecy, this promise. I don't understand—any of it."

Never had his wife's beauty appealed to Hendrie more than it did at that moment. A great depth of passionate feeling was stirring within him, but he permitted it no display. He was growing apprehensive, troubled. His doubt, too, was increasing.

Monica suddenly thrust out her hands in appeal.

"Oh, Alec, it is so hard, even now, to—to break my faith with the dead. And yet I know you are right. It—it is more than time for the truth. I think—yes, I believe if poor Elsie knew all, she would forgive me."

"Elsie?" The man's voice was sharply questioning.

"Yes, Elsie—my poor, dead sister."

"Go on."

"Yes, yes. I must go on." Monica drew a deep breath. "I can't understand. I don't seem to—— Oh, tell me where he is. My Frank, my poor Frank, Elsie's boy. The boy I

have brought up to manhood, the boy I have cared for all these years, the boy I have struggled and fought for. He—he is—lost. He has been spirited away as though he had never existed. And—I am told by the detectives to ask you where he is."

Hendrie's eyes were upon the carpet. He was no longer looking into the troubled face before him.

"Tell me," he said sharply; "when did you see him last?"

Monica no longer hesitated. Her husband's manner had become suddenly compelling.

"It was the last night I spent at Deep Willows," she said at once. "Just before you came home."

Hendrie raised his eyes. They were full of a dawning horror.

"The truth does demand," he cried almost fiercely. "Tell me! Tell me—as quickly as you can."

Monica was caught in the man's sudden excitement.

"Yes, yes, I will," she cried. "Oh, but it is a long story and—and a sordid one. It all happened when I was a young girl. I was only seventeen. Poor Elsie. She had been away a long time from home. Then she came home to me, her only relative. She came home to die, and dying gave birth to her son. You see, she was never married."

She paused, but went on at once at the man's prompt urging.

"She was never married, and the man left her in the hour of her direst need. Poor girl, even in her extremity she did not blame him. She loved him almost as much as she loved his little baby boy. She knew she was dying, nor did she seem to mind, except for her baby. He was her great anxiety. But even in that, her anxiety was chiefly that the child should never know of his mother's shame. So, almost with her last breath, she made me swear that I would bring him up as my own child. That I would keep her secret from him, and account for his father as being dead, with any story I chose to tell him. And I—I, a girl of seventeen, promised."

She paused. Then she hurried on as the questioning eyes of the man were again raised to her face.

"But what does it matter?" she cried suddenly. "She was my only sister and I loved her. From that day Frank became my own son, and, for nearly twenty years, I battled

with the world for him. Nor in our worst trials did I feel anything but the greatest joy in our mutual love. Oh, yes, when he grew up, I had to lie to him. I have had to lie, lie, lie all through. And when you came into my life I had to lie harder than ever. It was either that, or betray my sister's secret. That I could not do—even for your love. I chose the easier path. I lied so that I should not have to give you up."

"It is not quite clear—the necessity?" The man again raised his eyes to her face, but, almost at once, they turned back to the carpet.

"It is simple enough," Monica went on dully. "If I married you, to keep my sister's secret I must keep Frank in the background. Otherwise I should have to give explanations. To keep him in the background I must tell him a story that made it necessary. I did so. So that he should know nothing of Elsie's shame, and as I had brought him up to call me 'mother,' I did the only thing that seemed to me possible. I took the whole responsibility upon myself. I told him that though he was my son I had never been married. You see, I knew his love for me. I knew his chivalrous spirit. He wanted me to be happy in my newly found love, so—he accepted the situation."

Hendrie shook his head.

"You kept the letter of your promise to your sister, and—betrayed the spirit of it."

Monica hung her head.

"I know. I did it because—I could not give you up."

Hendrie looked up with something like anguish in his eyes.

"Oh, woman, woman," he cried. "Why didn't you take me into your confidence? These lies could have been saved, and—and all these other, and even more, terrible consequences. Listen to me, and I will tell you all the rest. I can see it now. I can see it more clearly than you can tell me. He called himself Frank—Smith?"

Monica started.

"Yes. Whenever he visited me at Deep Willows. His real name was Frank Burton."

Hendrie's gaze wandered toward the window. The street lamps had just been lit. Never in his life had he known what it was to humble himself before another. Never had he known

what it was to excuse himself for any act of his. Now he knew he must do both of these things.

Monica stepped eagerly forward from the shadow of the curtains.

"You—you know where he is?" she demanded.

Hendrie nodded. Then a strange thing happened. A harsh, mirthless laugh rang through the darkening room. Monica stared at the man's unsmiling face, horrified, and at a loss to understand.

"Then where is he?" she cried blankly.

"He is in the penitentiary, serving five years for breaking into Deep Willows, and robbing my safe of a bunch of money that belonged to you."

"Oh, God have mercy!"

The cry rang through the room. Monica reeled and would have fallen. In a moment her husband's arms were about her. But she flung him off, and her action was one of something like loathing. She stood up facing him, and pointing at him, while her agonized eyes challenged his.

"You—you!" she cried fiercely. Then: "Go on! Tell me —tell me quickly! It is you—you who have done this!"

Hendrie drew himself up. There was no hesitation about him, no shrinking before the story he had to tell.

"Yes, I did it," he said. "I—I! I have listened to your story. Now listen to mine, and when you blame me, you must blame yourself as well. I have loved you desperately. I love you now. God knows how I love you. If I did not I could never have endured what I have endured in the past and kept my reason. That is my excuse for what I have done.

"I saw that picture in your rooms and took the man to be an old lover. I hated him, and—I tore it up. I told you then there could only be one man in your life. I destroyed that pasteboard as I would destroy any one who came between us."

Monica remained silent while the man choked down his rising emotion.

"After we were married I became aware of the clandestine visits of a handsome man, to you, at Deep Willows. You were known to have embraced him."

"You—you spied!"

"I did not spy—then. I learned these things, nor does

it matter how. I determined to crush this man I believed to be your lover. I determined to be rid of him once and for all. My love for you was so great that what I believed to be your guilt left me quite untouched. It was men I understood; men with whom I was accustomed to deal. I meant to deal with this man. So I set to work. I need not tell you how I tracked him down and kept him watched. It is sufficient that I knew of his visit to Deep Willows on the night in question. My plans were carefully laid. I left very little to chance. You were in the library with him, and Angus summoned you, to give you some important news he had received from me. I had arranged that. At the time the telephone bell rang I was beyond the window with the sheriff of Everton. The moment you left the room I entered it. I found this man with a bunch of money in his hand, and the safe open behind him. I had not hoped for such luck. I charged him then and there with the theft. Oh, I knew he had not stolen it. You had given it him, and it made me the more furious. I could have shot him where he stood. But it could not have been sufficient punishment. I meant to crush him.

"Then I did the cruelest thing I could think of. I told him that I knew he had not stolen the money. I told him that he could clear himself of the charge by calling you into the witness box. In that way I knew that what I believed to be your shame would reach the whole world. But soon I was to see the stuff he was made of. He would not drag your name into the matter. He submitted to the charge with a simple declaration of his innocence, and I was well enough satisfied. The rest was sheriff's work. Within certain limits I knew I could buy the law, and I bought it. The case was kept out of the papers, and you were sent well away from any possibility of hearing of it. The name he was tried under, and which he clung to, helped further to disguise his identity. That night when you returned to the library, as I knew you would, you found the place in order, and the boy gone. You had no possible suspicion of what had occurred. You could have none. You remember I drove up later, as from Everton, in my automobile."

Hendrie ceased speaking. Monica remained silent. She stood quite still looking into his face as though she were

striving to read all that lay behind it, trying to fathom to the very limits the primitive motives which had driven this man to the dreadful cruelty he had so readily inflicted. He had sent Frank, her boy, to a felon's prison. Sent him without one single scruple, without mercy. He had committed, besides, every base action he could have been guilty of to achieve his purpose, and all—for love of her.

She tried to think it all out clearly. She tried to see it through his eyes, but she could not. The hideousness of it all was too terrible. It was unforgivable.

At last she spoke. Her voice was hard and cold. In it Hendrie detected, he believed, the sentence her woman's heart had passed upon him.

"He must be released at once," she said, in a tone that warned him of all he had lost. "If you do not contrive this at once the world shall know the whole story—yours as well as mine."

The man made a slight movement. It was as though he had flinched before a blow in the face.

"He shall be released," he said.

"He must be released—at once." Monica's icy tone was final.

She turned away, moving toward the door. Then suddenly she paused, and a moan of despair broke from her.

"Oh, Alec," she cried, "how—how could you? How could you do it?"

The man was at her side in a moment.

"I love you, Mon," he cried, in deep tones. "You are more precious to me than all the world—than life itself. Can't you understand? Can't you see just something of what my eyes saw? Where you are concerned it is all so different. I could not, dared not lose you. I hated this man, who I believed had robbed me of your love."

Monica's agonized eyes were raised to his for a moment.

"But where was your faith? Where your trust?" she cried. "Why, why did you not openly accuse me?"

"Accuse you? Mon, you have yet to learn all that my love means. You think me, the world thinks me, a strong, even ruthless man. There is truth enough in the latter—God knows. But for the rest, where you are concerned, I am weak—so weak. I am more than that. I am an utter coward,

too. While my heart might break at the knowledge of your infidelity, it would be incomparable to losing you out of my life. Why did I not accuse you openly? Because I was afraid to hear the truth from your lips. Do you know what would have happened had you confessed to me that you loved this man? It would have meant—murder. Oh, not your death," as Monica drew away horrified at the terrible sincerity of the threat. "That man would have died. Now can you understand? Won't you understand?"

There was a dreadful moment of doubt, of anxiety, while the man waited an answer to his appeal. No prisoner could have awaited sentence with more desperate hope. His eyes devoured the woman's averted face, while his heart hungered for the faintest gleam of hope it might hold out. And waiting he wondered. Was there anything in a woman's love at all, or was he to be condemned to a life with the doors of her soul closed and barred against him for ever?

It seemed an endless waiting. Then she gave a sign. She turned to him, and raised a pair of eyes, whose sadness and distress smote him to the heart, and looked up into his face. Then he knew, however undeserved, her love was still his.

"Perhaps I can understand, Alec, but—but give me time." Monica spoke in a deep, tender voice that was full of pain, full of suffering. "I am beginning to understand many things I did not comprehend before. You, perhaps, are not so much to blame as I thought. I have been so weak, too. A little candor and honesty on my part might have saved it all. We are both terribly to blame, and perhaps most of it lies at my door. Let us try to forget ourselves. Let us forget everything but that which we owe to Frank. We both owe him so much. Oh, when I think of the way I have fulfilled poor Elsie's trust I feel as though my heart would break."

"If ever a trust was carried out truly, yours has been, Mon."

The man's arms were about her, and he gently drew her to him. He gazed tenderly down upon her now tear-stained face.

"No woman could have done more than you have," he went on. "If things have gone awry it is no fault of yours." He smoothed her beautiful hair with one tender hand. "I

give you my sacred word your Frank shall be released. I swear it by the memory of your poor dead sister. I can still undo the mischief which my mad jealousy has wrought, and your—Elsie will forgive."

He bent and kissed her upturned face, while she clung to him for support.

"Yes, yes, she will forgive. It was her nature to forgive," Monica said, in a wave of tender memory. "To the last she would not hear one word against the wretched father of her boy. Do you know, Alec, I sometimes wonder that Heaven allows such men to go about working their cruel mischief upon trusting women."

Hendrie stirred uneasily, and his arms gently released her.

"Tell me of her—of him," he said, his eyes turned upon the streaming light from the street lamps.

Monica became thoughtful.

"I know so little about him," she said, after a slight pause. "You see, I never saw him; and Elsie—she would say so little. It seems she met him in New York. I forgot to tell you Elsie was an actress. She acted under the name of Audie Thorne."

The man started. Then, slowly, his eyes came back to her face. Fortunately their expression was lost upon her, and, before she could turn in his direction, he was once more gazing out at the brilliant light which, somehow, he was no longer aware of. He was listening to his wife's voice, but her words conveyed little enough to him now. His mind was far back in a dim, almost forgotten past.

"I don't know how it all happened," Monica went on. "She was doing so well on the stage. Then she met this man, Leo. The next thing she was up in the Yukon with him. He was prospecting. Then they were traveling down country—overland—with an Indian scout. That's when he deserted her. She only managed to reach me, in San Sabatano, through the aid of the scout. He gave her money. Money paid him for the trip." Then a world of contempt crept into her voice. "I suppose it was the coming of Elsie's baby which frightened him—the cowardly brute."

Hendrie nodded, his face studiously averted.

"Perhaps," he murmured. "But one can never be sure of such a man's motives."

"Motives?" There was unutterable scorn in the woman's

voice. "And while he goes free, she, poor soul, is left to suffer and die—in the—gutter!"

"But—you sheltered her? You cared for her?"

The man's voice was almost pleading.

"Thank God, I could at least do that—but it was not through any doing of his. Oh, if only I had the punishing of such—as he."

"Perhaps he will get his punishment, even as you could desire it. Perhaps he has got it."

"I pray God it may be so."

Quite suddenly Hendrie turned about and faced her. His face was thrown into the shadow by the light of the window, which was now behind him.

"These are past days, Mon," he said, in his decided fashion. "We have to do with errors, faults of the present. I must get to work at once to repair something of the damage I have done. You employed detectives. Who?"

"The Redtown Agency."

"Good. I will see them at once. You must dine alone to-night. I will report later."

The man moved suddenly across to his desk, and one hand fell heavily upon the carved mahogany of it. He looked across into the face of the woman he loved, and the fire of a great purpose shone in his eyes.

"Thank God I am the rich man I am!" he cried. "Thank God for the power of wealth. You shall see, Mon, you shall see! Leave me now, for I must—work. Hark!"

The deep note of the dinner gong rang out its opulent song in the hall.

"Dinner!" Hendrie remained standing. "You had better go—now."

Monica reluctantly moved toward the door and opened it.

"Very well, dear," she said. "You will tell me all you have done—later. Thank God, there is no more need for secrecy between us."

The brilliant light of the hall silhouetted her figure as she stood. But for once, though his eyes took in every detail of the picture she made, Alexander Hendrie remained wholly unappreciative.

His mind was already far away, moving swiftly over other, long past scenes. He was not even thinking of the innocent

victim of his jealousy. He was traveling again the long, lean, cruel winter trail. He was once more toiling amid the snows of the bitter north.

"You are sure, sure—it can be done?"

The spell was broken.

"Sure," the man replied, with a heavy sigh.

The door closed. The darkened room was still and silent. For some moments the man remained standing where he was. Then he slowly moved over the soft rugs to the light switch on the wall, and his hand rested upon it. He hesitated. Then, with an impatient movement, he pressed the brass knob, and the room was flooded with light.

He stared out across the sumptuous furnishings, but did not attempt to move. His face was ghastly in the glare of light. His eyes were full of horror and straining.

Presently he moved a step toward the desk. It was only one step. He halted. Slowly his look of horror deepened. He raised one great hand and passed the fingers of it through his mane of tawny hair. It was the movement of a man half dazed. Then his lips moved.

"Audie!" he murmured, in a hoarse whisper. "Audie!"

CHAPTER III

TWO LETTERS

Number "Forty-nine" was standing just inside and clear of the door of his cell. It was dinner time in the Alston Penitentiary. On the gallery outside the faint hubbub of the distribution of food just reached him. He was hungry, even for prison fare.

"Forty-nine" heard the trolley stop at the door of the next cell. He heard the click of the lock as the door was opened. Then came the sodden sound of something moist emptied into a pannikin, and then the swish of liquid. The door clicked again, and he knew his turn was next.

The trolley stopped. His door opened. A man, in the hideous striped costume, like his own, of a fellow-convict, winked up into his face. It was the friendly wink of an evil

eye. The man passed him in a loaf of black bread. Then, with a dexterity almost miraculous, a second loaf shot into "forty-nine's" hands, and was immediately secreted in the rolled hammock, which served for a bed.

The whole thing was done almost under the very eyes of a watchful warder. But he remained in ignorance of it. The double ration was a friendly act that was more than appreciated, however evil the eye that winked its sympathy. The prisoner's shining pannikin was filled, and a thin stream of cocoa was poured into his large tin cup. Then the trolley and its attendants passed on, and the door automatically closed.

"Forty-nine" glanced about him, and, finally, sat on the floor of his cell. He sniffed at the vegetable stew in his pannikin, and tasted it. Yes, he was too hungry to reject the watery slush. He took a loaf, tore it in shreds with his fingers and sopped it in the liquid. Then he devoured it as rapidly as the hard black crust would permit. After that his attention was turned to the cocoa. The same process was adopted here, and, by the time his meal was finished, and the process of cleaning his utensils was begun, his appetite was fully appeased.

It was a hideous place, this dreadful cell. It was bare from the ceiling above to the hard floor on which he was sitting. In one corner a hammock was rolled up to a universal pattern adopted throughout the prison. There was a small box in one corner in which cleaning materials were carefully packed, and close by were placed two books from the prison library. For the rest there was nothing but the bare walls, in which, high up, was set a grated aperture to admit light and air.

After cleaning up his utensils in orthodox fashion "forty-nine" went to his box and produced a lump of uneatable, half cured bacon fat, left from his breakfast. With this he calmly set to work on a process of massaging his hands. The work of the convict prison was cruel. In a short while hands would become a mere mockery of their original form. To obviate this, the fat bacon process had been adopted, and "forty-nine" had learned it from the fellow-convicts, more familiar with the ways and conditions of prison life.

"Forty-nine's" self-appointed task was just completed

when, without warning, the door of his cell suddenly opened, and the burly form of a rubber-shod warder appeared.

"Forty-nine! For the governor. Right away!"

There was just a suspicion of softening from the warder's usual manner in the order.

"Forty-nine" looked up without interest. His eyes were hollow, his cheeks drawn. A deep, hopeless melancholy seemed to weigh upon his whole expression. A year of one of the hardest penitentiaries in the country, with the prospect of years of service yet to complete, left hope far beyond the reach of his crushed spirit. He stood up obediently. His manner was pathetically submissive. His great frame, little more than frame, towered over his guard.

The man stood aside from the doorway and the convict passed out.

The governor looked up from his desk in the center of a large, simply furnished hall. Behind a wrought iron cage at the far end of the apartment stood number "Forty-nine," with the warder close behind.

The governor turned to his secretary and spoke in an undertone. He was a youngish, baldheaded man who had acquired nothing of the hardness of visage to be found in his subordinates. Just now there was something almost like a kindly, sympathetic twinkle in his eyes as he opened out a sheaf of papers, evidently to do with the man just ushered into his presence.

The secretary rose from his seat and walked over to the iron cage. Unfastening a heavy lock he flung it open. To the prisoner, full of the bitterness of his lot, it almost seemed as though he were some wild beast being suddenly released from captivity.

The secretary signed to the warder to bring his charge into the room. This unusual proceeding left the astonished warder at a loss. And it required a sharp order from the governor himself to move him.

"Forty-nine" was conducted to the far side of the desk, and the governor looked him in the face.

"I am pleased to be able to inform you—er—a free pardon has been—er—extended to you."

The announcement was made in formal tones, but the

look in the eyes of the speaker was the only human thing to be found in the notorious Alston Penitentiary. Even the worst criminals who were brought into contact with Governor Charles Raymond had, however grudgingly, to admit his humanity, which only left it the greater mystery that the methods of his prison were all so directly opposed to his nature.

"Forty-nine" started. For a moment the settled melancholy of his cadaverous face lightened. A hand went up to his head as though to ascertain that he was not dreaming. It came into contact with the bristles of his cropped hair, and dropped at once to his side.

"I'm to go—free, sir?"

"That's precisely what I'm telling you."

"Forty-nine's" eyes rolled. He looked from the governor to the secretary.

"Pardon?" he said. Then a hot light grew in his eyes at an inner sense of injustice in the method of his release. "But I've done nothing wrong, sir."

Charles Raymond smiled. But his smile was genuine and expressed none of the usual incredulity.

"That is a matter for yourself. I simply receive my orders from the usual authorities. Those orders are that a free pardon has been extended to you. I also have here a letter for you, which, since it is in a lady's handwriting, and you are to be released at once, I have waived the regulations and refrained from opening. You will receive your railroad fare to whatever place in the country you wish to go. Also the usual prison allowance in cash. That will do. The prison chaplain will visit you before you go out."

"I don't need to see him, sir. He tires me."

The secretary looked up sharply at the fiercely resentful tone of the prisoner's denial. But the governor only smiled.

"As you will," he said, and signed again to the warder. "Your letter will be handed to you at the outer gate—with the other things."

"Forty-nine" was marched off. He re-entered the iron cage and vanished amid the labyrinth of iron galleries beyond.

As he passed out of the office the governor turned to his secretary.

"I've looked up the record of that man's trial. Guess there's some mystery behind it. Poor devil. Only a youngster, too. I wonder." Then he turned to his papers again. "Well, they got him by the heels, and started him on the road to hell, anyway. Poor devil."

The secretary's murmured agreement with his chief's commiseration was non-committal. He had no sympathy. He took his salary and anything else that came his way. To him convicts were not human.

It was late in the afternoon when Frank Burton found himself at the outer wicket of the prison. He was clad now in his own clothes; the clothes he had worn on the night of his arrest. His prairie hat was crushed unusually low upon his close-cropped head. As he approached he called out his number for the last time.

"Forty-nine!"

The guard was ready for him.

"Going to Toronto?" he said, pushing a paper and pen toward him. "Twenty-eight dollars and seventy cents. Prison allowance four dollars fifty. Your letter. Sign!"

The money was handed to him in separate amounts, and the letter was placed beside them. Frank signed in a trembling hand, and took his possessions. Then he moved toward the wicket.

"So long!" cried the chief guard. Then he added facetiously. "Maybe I'll see you again some day."

Frank made no answer. He was beyond words. He passed through the wicket, which the guard opened for him, and stood outside in the summer evening light—a free man.

But he experienced no feeling of elation. A sort of apathy had got hold of him. His liberty now seemed almost a matter of indifference, and it was merely a mechanical movement that took him away from the frowning gray stone ramparts which had held him for a long twelve months. He had no thought of whither his steps were taking him. That, too, seemed to be a matter of no importance.

He moved on and on, quite slowly. His letter was still unopened in his pocket, whence it had been thrust along with his money. The trail wound its way down the hill upon which the prison stood. It led on, nearly two miles away, to

the village of Alston. But it might have been Chicago for all Frank cared.

He was thinking of the past year, and all the events which led up to his incarceration, with the bitterness of spirit which only such unutterable degradation could inspire. Nor, curiously enough, were his feelings directed against the author, or the methods by which his downfall had been brought about. All that had long since exhausted itself during the interminable hours of wakefulness spent in his stuffy cell. His feelings against the man had worn themselves out, that is, they had settled down to a cold, unemotional hatred. No, it was the thought of life itself which haunted him like an evil shadow, from which he would gladly have escaped.

For him life seemed to be ended. Whichever way he looked it was the same. Nothing could help him, nothing could save him from the hideous stigma under which he lay. He was a convict, an ex-convict, and to the hour of his death so he would remain. Wherever he went the pointing finger would follow him. There was no escape. The brutalizing influence under which he had existed for twelve months had got into his very bones.

He told himself that he belonged to the underworld, to the same world to which some of those wretched beings belonged who had only escaped death at the hands of the law on some slight quibble, and with whom he had so recently herded. The daylight could never again be for him. He belonged to the darkened streets where recognition was less easy, where crime stalked abroad, and flitting shadows of pursuer and pursued hovered the night long.

He sank wearily at the roadside. His weariness was of spirit. His body was as hard as nails from the tremendous physical labors of the past year. A morbid craving to review his wrongs was upon him, that and an invincible desire to wait for the gathering of the evening shadows.

The westering sun was shining full upon him. A great waste of open land stretched away toward a purple line of low hills, fringed with a darker shadow of woods. Not a living soul was about, no one but himself seemed to be upon that trail—and he was glad.

For long hours he sat brooding, and, with each passing

minute, his morbid fancies grew. He felt that from the beginning he had been doomed to disaster, and he only wondered that he had not realized it before. Was he not a bastard? Was he not a nobody? His father? He never had a father, only the wretched creature whose selfish passions had brought him into the world.

He saw it all in its true colors now. He could more fully understand it. That was the brand under which he was born, and it was a brand which was part of the criminal side of life.

His thoughts drifted on to Phyllis. She had not understood when he told her. How could she? She was clean, she was wholesome, she was born in wedlock. She—but he turned impatiently from the drift of his thoughts. He could never go back to her. She, like his mother, was a part of that life which was over and done with. He belonged to another world now. The underworld.

The underworld. But why—why should he live on, part of a world he hated and loathed? Why should he permit the cruel injustice of such a fate? There was a way to defeat this ruthless enemy. Why not adopt it? Why live? He had no desire to do so. He had the means at his disposal. He had money with which to procure a gun. Why go to Toronto at all? Why show his shaven head to the world, an object for that hateful, pointing finger?

For a while the idea pleased him. It was such a simple remedy for all his sufferings. He had passed out of Phyllis's life, so why risk the finger of scorn being pointed at her through the fact of his existence. And his mother. His gentle mother. He caught his breath. The finger of scorn would never be a burden to her. She was not like others. Her memory still retained the faintest sheen of light amid his darkness. He knew, even in those dark moments, that his self-inflicted death would utterly destroy her life. No. He was condemned to this under——

He remembered his unopened letter, and drew it from his pocket. He had not looked at it before. It had never occurred to him that he had any connection still with a world beyond the gray stone prison walls.

Now he looked at the envelope, and felt the hot blood of shame sweep up to his tired brain as he saw that it bore his

mother's handwriting. He opened it reluctantly enough.

Folded carefully inside a number of sheets of closely written paper was a large sum of money. He took it out and examined it. There were five thousand dollars. Most of it was in bills of large denomination, but on the top, with careful forethought, there were half a dozen which ran from ten dollars down to one dollar bills. He understood, and the careful attention only left him the more pained.

With these was a smaller envelope. It was addressed in Phyllis's well-known hand. This, with the money, he bestowed in an inner pocket and proceeded to read his mother's letter first.

But the pathos of it, the breaking heart, which was sufficiently apparent in every line of that long story she had to tell, passed him utterly by, and left him unmoved. Just now he had no sympathy for anything or anybody in the world but himself, and it would have needed the heart of a Puritan to have blamed him. Yet his reading was not without interest in spite of the hardness of his mood.

It was a long, long story that Monica had to tell him, and it was full of that detail, rambling detail, inspired by the knowledge that she no longer had anything to conceal, the knowledge that the truth could be indulged in, in a manner that had been so long denied her. From the very outset she told him the real facts of his birth, and it was with something approaching regret that he learned that she, Monica, was not his mother. Somehow the shame of his birth, as it had reflected upon her, was forgotten. Somehow the stigma seemed to belong to him solely.

In her story she carried him through the old, old days of their life together, reminding him of trials and struggles never before fully explained. Tribulations which pointed for him her devotion and loyalty to the dead and the living.

Then she passed on to the manner in which he had been trapped by her husband. Here were displayed her passion-torn feelings, which left the man cold. She gave all the details in uncolored nakedness, and while condemning utterly, the cruelty and injustice of her husband, she yet pointed his motives and pleaded for him.

Then she passed on to the manner of her own discovery of his whereabouts in prison, her own discovery of her hus-

band's ruthless handiwork. And again came that note of pleading for the man she loved. She told him how Hendrie, directly he discovered his hideous mistake, moved heaven and earth, and scattered money broadcast, to obtain his release; and how, at last, he had succeeded.

Finally she appealed to him with all the ardor of a mother's love to come back to her at once. To come back and receive all the reparation which she and her husband were yearning to make.

At the end of the reading Frank refolded the letter and returned it to his pocket. In spite of the identity of its author, in spite of his own natural kindliness of heart, there was not one sign of softening in his now hardened blue eyes.

It was different, however, with his second letter. Phyllis had no story to tell, she had no forgiveness to plead for any one. She merely had the fullness of her own simple, loving heart to pour out at his feet. Not once through four pages of closely written paper did she hint at his hardships, his dreadful wrongs. She loved him, she wanted him, as she believed he loved and wanted her; and so she just told him, as only Phyllis, with her wide understanding and simplicity of heart could have told him.

As he returned this letter to his pocket there was a marked difference in his manner. There was a lingering tenderness in his actions, and a dewy moisture about his hollow eyes.

The sun had set, and a golden twilight was softening the world to a gentle, almost velvet tone as he rose from the edge of the grass-lined trail. He stood erect. That painful slouch he had acquired during the past year appeared to have left his shoulders. His head was lifted, and he began to walk down the trail at a gait full of decision and purpose. Phyllis's love had heartened him as it always heartened him. Something of his morbid shadows had receded before the brightly burning lamp of her love. He felt a better man, and a spirit of defiance had risen to combat the claims of that underworld which had threatened to swallow him up.

At Alston he made his way to a store where he could procure some letter paper and envelopes. Just for one moment he hesitated at the door of the building. He was about to meet a free citizen. One who had never known

prison bars. With a thrust he drew his hat well down to his ears, squared his shoulders and went in. His precautions proved needless. The man who served him was used to such visitors, and quite indifferent. He scarcely even looked at him as he fulfilled his order, and took the prison money.

Frank hurried away. His self-consciousness was quite painful. But he meant to beat it.

His next effort was a restaurant. He was a long time making his selection. Nor did it occur to him to wonder at the number of cheap eating houses this small village supported. Finally, however, he accepted the doubtful hospitality of a Chinese establishment where they dispensed a cheap chop-suey. Again his appearance cause no surprise as he gave his order and then sat down at a corner table.

Here he drew out his letter paper and laid it on the much-stained table before him, and, in a moment, had forgotten the almond-eyed attendant who was preparing his food.

He felt it necessary to answer Monica's letter at once. His purpose was definite and quite clear in his mind. The past, his past, their past was done with. He would face the world alone, and on his own resources. The letter was quite short and was finished before the Chinaman brought him his food.

His meal finished and bill settled, he waited until the lynx-eyed Mongolian was engaged elsewhere. Then he placed the letter and the five thousand dollars into an envelope and addressed it to Monica at Winnipeg. It was his intention to mail the packet from Toronto.

CHAPTER IV

ON THE RAILROAD

No man may serve a term of imprisonment in a modern prison and return to freedom on the same moral plane as he left it. A man may fall, but he may rise again, provided he is saved from that lifelong branding which a penal prison leaves upon its victim. Innocent or guilty the modern prison system is an invention which must rob its victim for ever of his confidence, his self-respect, almost of his hope. It is an

institution set up to protect the free citizen, and terrorize the wrong-doer into better ways. And it does neither of these things. Instead, it pours upon society, daily, a stream of hopeless, hardened, bitter creatures, who, through its merciless process, have abandoned what little grip they ever had upon their moral natures, and drives them along the broad, ill-lit road of crime. Instead of being the deterrent it is supposed to be, it is the worst creator of crime known to civilization.

These were some of the reflections forced upon young Frank Burton after twelve months' bitter experience in Alston Penitentiary. And now, with each passing moment of his new freedom, the truth of these painful observations was more and more surely brought home to him. An innocent man, he had come out into the light of freedom, dreading and shrinking before every eye that was turned in his direction. His self-confidence was shaken. All his old trust and belief in the goodness of the life about him seemed to have melted into dark and painful suspicion, and, for the time at least, he was forced into those darkened purlieus which belong to the world of crime. The light was unendurable.

He had changed terribly from the buoyant lad he had been. He had seen so much, thought so much during those twelve long months, that now he was weighted down by a maturity that belonged to twice his years.

He knew he could never go back to the old life. That he had long since made up his mind up to. More than that, he could not accept benefits from those who belonged to it, whom he had known and loved. Even Phyllis, for all her ardent affection, she, too, belonged to a life that was wholly dead.

The future, his future, lay in his own two empty hands. Those whom he loved, and those whom he hated and despised could have no part in it. Were it otherwise he felt that to see Monica would be to bring him into contact with Hendric, and such contact could only stir in him all the evil influences of the prison, influences from which it was his determination to escape.

Phyllis? Little Phyllis?

No. She must go, too. The band of the criminal had sunk too deeply into his soul. She must be left free. No

such contamination must be brought into her life. His love for her was far too great for him to submit her to such a dreadful disaster as marriage with an ex-convict.

He had thought of all these things before, he thought again of them now. They were rarely absent from his mind.

The moment he read Monica's letter he knew what he intended to do. And it was the same when he hungrily devoured the words of devotion he received from Phyllis. Dealing with Monica's letter had been simple enough. With Phyllis's it was a far different matter. He wanted her to understand. He knew he must hurt her, but he felt that by presenting all his feelings to her, she, with her wide understanding, would appreciate and accept his decisions.

The whole journey from Alston to Fieldcoats, in the old-fashioned rumbling "stage," was given up to these hopeless meditations of an outcast. And he was glad of it. He was glad that he had the time to think of the letter he must send this girl at once.

It was dark when the twinkling lights of Fieldcoats, the nearest town where he would take train for Toronto, came into view, and he was glad of that friendly obscurity. His shrinking from the light was no morbid feeling. With his close-cropped head the story of his recent past was open for every one to read.

He did not complete the journey to the final halting place of the stage, but dropped off it in the lower and more obscure part of the town. It was here that he meant to begin his new life. A cheap, clean bed was all he desired, just a place where he could rest between sheets, and write his long letter to Phyllis. He wanted something solid on four legs. Something which would not remind him of the hammock he had learned to hate.

He found the place he required without difficulty. It vaunted the title, "The Alexandra Hotel," and its beds, in cubicles, were let out at twenty-five cents and ten cents a night. It was a mere "dossing house," but that was quite a matter of indifference. He felt he had no right to squeamishness.

He booked one of the higher priced cubicles and ascertained that it was clean. Then, with a sigh of resignation, and some squaring of the shoulders, he prepared to face the

curious eyes of the derelicts who haunted the "office" of the establishment.

To face even these, with his close-cropped head, Frank found no light task, but he knew that for weeks yet he must keep himself hardened to the consciousness of his prison brand. The only thing possible was a desperately bold front, a front that would intimidate the curious, and, if necessary, he must follow it up with all it threatened.

So he entered the room and calmly looked about him. He was big, spare, and enormously powerful. His hard blue eyes deliberately sought for any eye that might be turned in his direction. His trouble was wasted. He forgot that these poor creatures, lounging upon the hard Windsor chairs, reading papers, or staring hopelessly before them while they smoked, were derelicts like himself. Nobody gave him the slightest heed, and he was left to seek out his obscure corner where he could write in peace.

Once assured of his immunity, Frank began his letter, and promptly became completely lost to his surroundings. The long-pent thoughts of the past year flowed passionately as he attempted to show the girl he loved all that which lay deep down in his simple heart.

It was not, perhaps, the convincing letter of a deep thinker. It was not a letter full of the refinement of logical argument. He wrote just as he thought, and felt, and saw, with a mind tinged by the dark hues of his own sufferings and the sufferings of others.

He told her, simple creature that he was, of all his love for her. He told her of the aching heart which this definite parting left him with, and, in the same breath almost, he told her that he regarded it as his sacred duty to shield her from contamination with a disgrace such as his. He forgot that where a real woman's love is concerned, duty, and perhaps any other scruple is willingly flung aside.

His simplicity carried him into deeper water, for he wrote long and ardently of his own future, a future conceived, and to be founded upon all he had seen and experienced in prison. Again he forgot the wide mind of the girl he was writing to, and blindly believed that the sincerity and honesty of his motives must appeal to her.

It was altogether a headlong sort of letter. He wrote as

he thought and felt, and scarcely paused for a word or phrase. The gist of it was a yearning for a sort of sublime socialism. He could not longer bear the thought of self-seeking. He had seen so much of the disastrous results of it that he felt and knew that the whole process of it was utterly wrong. The prisons were filled with its results.

Those things, he said, had started his train of thought, and, with each passing day, his eyes had become more fully opened.

All the old ambitions, he told her, had been rooted out of him for ever. They were the natural impulses of a heart and mind all untutored, and far too immature for the real understanding of life. He had desired wealth and place in the world, and it had seemed good to him to so desire. Nor was it to be wondered at. Such desires had been inspired by honest motives, if, perhaps, selfish. They were just the first teachings of life until—it presented the reverse side of the picture.

He had been shown the reverse of the picture, and it had come in time. For twelve months he had gazed upon it and learned its lessons. For twelve months he had groped amid the cobwebs of life and sought among the darkened corners. That which he had discovered there had plainly shown him that, for him, past and future ambitions were divided by a gulf that could never be bridged again. In future his life would be cast on the side of the helpless and struggling, on the side of the oppressed, and those who were less endowed for the battle of life.

The battle of life? There should be no battle. There never was a battle intended. Why should there be? Was there not more than enough to go round? It was only because the laws of man permitted accumulations to the individual and so reduced more than half the world to a position bordering on starvation, a condition which lay at the very root of all crime. The old belief in the survival of the fittest was a dead one. It applied to simple physical conditions, not to the right to enjoy a fair share of those blessings a beneficent Creator had provided for the benefit of all. Think of it, he appealed, think of the king of beasts cornering all the food upon which his species depended to support life. Picture one proud brute standing over a hoard of rotting

flesh, flourishing his tail and snarling defiance at a crowd of starving creatures of his own kind. Would they permit it? Would they leave him in possession? No, they would set upon him in their numbers, and, in desperation, they would tear him limb from limb.

Brotherhood and Equality! That was to be the keynote of his future. Henceforth all his power, all his heart should be flung into the only cause that could make the world endurable.

So he wrote to this girl of more than common wisdom, and he told himself she would understand. He told himself that though their lives could never come together again, at least he would possess her sympathy.

It was long past midnight when Frank's letter was folded in its cheap envelope and addressed. But its writing had done him good. It had been inspired by a big heart, if little wisdom, and he felt that he had taken his first step upon the new road opening out before him.

There were still stragglers in the office when he finally retired to his cubicle. Some were sleepily drunk, after an evening spent in "cadging" drinks among the low-class saloons in the neighborhood. Some were merely utterly weary with a long day of vain searching for some means of livelihood. All were unkempt and tattered, and most of them dirty.

These were some of the poor creatures belonging to the ranks of those, who, in his lofty ideals of the work that lay before him, Frank hoped to range himself on the side of. In his youthful blindness he failed utterly to recognize the workings of the definite laws of compensation. He missed entirely the most glaring fact of life. It passed him by that the majority of these were *able-bodied* men who had wilfully thrown away the chances which life never fails to offer, for the indulgence of those selfish passions which in his heart he abhorred.

That night he slept the fitful sleep of a man unusued to his surroundings, but he was sufficiently refreshed when the hour appointed for arising in such places arrived. He turned out quite ready to face all that the day might bring forth. He knew that he must endure many trials of patience and feelings. But he intended to face them with a brave heart.

Ten cents was all he allowed himself for his breakfast.

He required only sufficient to sustain life, nor did he obtain more for the money. Then he made his way to the railroad depot, forcing himself to a blindness for the attention his appearance attracted. Here he made inquiries as to the train, and booked his passage. The train for Toronto left just before noon, so he purchased a newspaper and sat down in the waiting-hall. He intended to pass the time scanning the advertisements, that he might learn the best means of obtaining employment when he arrived at his destination.

The train was "on time," and, in due course, Frank boarded it. The car he selected was fairly empty. At the far end of it a party of people, evidently a family party, occupied several seats. For the rest five or six men and two women were scattered about its length.

He took his place in the rear seat of the coach, feeling that it was preferable to have no inquisitive eyes behind him. Those who displayed marked attention from in front he felt confident of being able to deal with. But he reckoned without his host.

The first part of his journey was quite uneventful. But at the first important town at which the train stopped several passengers boarded the car. Among them was a man with closely trimmed iron gray hair, and quick, searching eyes that closely scanned the faces of each person in the car.

His stare was not wholly rude. It was the searching glance of a man who is accustomed to studying his fellows, who never fails to do so at any opportunity. He took a corner seat just across the aisle of the car, and on the level immediately in front of Frank. He sat turned so that the whole view of the car came within his focus. Nor was it a matter of more than moments before Frank's cropped head came under his observation.

Frank felt that this was so, although he was studiously intent upon his paper, and, as the fixed contemplation remained, he chafed under it. For some time he endured it, hoping that, the man's curiosity satisfied, he would turn away. But nothing of the sort happened. The stranger's interest became riveted.

Frank felt himself grow hot with resentment. He determined to put an end to it by the simple process of staring the man out of countenance. To this end he looked up

sharply, and with anything but a friendly expression in his cold eyes. As their eyes met there was something like a deliberate challenge in the exchange. The man made no attempt to withdraw his gaze, and Frank found himself looking into a clean-shaven, keen, determined face, lit by a pair of hard, satirical eyes.

Promptly the position became more than intolerable, and Frank was driven to a very natural verbal protest. He sprang from his seat and crossed the aisle. Leaning across the back of the stranger's seat he voiced his annoyance deliberately and coldly.

"It seems to me you'll probably know me when you see me again," he said, with angry sarcasm.

The stranger smiled amiably.

"Just depends when I meet you," he retorted, with a meaning glance at the close-cropped hair displayed under the brim of Frank's hat.

A sudden anger lit the boy's eyes at the taunt, and a violent protest leaped to his lips. But the stranger anticipated him.

"Say," he drawled, "sit right down—here. I wasn't meaning offence. What got me looking was you're so like—an old friend of mine. You brought the other on yourself. Won't you sit—right down?"

The stranger's manner was so disarmingly cordial that Frank's heat began to die down. Still, he had no intention of accepting the invitation.

"Maybe you didn't intend rudeness, but that isn't the point," he said deliberately. "I'm not the man to stand rudeness from—anybody."

"Sure," said the other calmly. "Guess that's how we all feel. Say, it's the queerest thing. Guess you're 'bout twenty or so. Just about his age. You're the dead image of —my friend, when he was your age. You got blue eyes and his were gray. It's the only spark of difference. Going up Toronto way?"

Frank nodded. He somehow felt he could do no less, without returning in cold silence to his seat. Somehow he felt that to do so would be churlish, in spite of the fact that he was the aggrieved.

The keen-eyed stranger recognized his advantage in ob-

taining the admission, and promptly followed it up. He indicated the seat beside him and persisted in his invitation.

"Best sit," he said, with a pleasant smile. "It's quite a long piece to Toronto. I'd a heap like to yarn with you."

The stranger was altogether too much for the simplicity of the other. Besides, there was nothing but amiability in his manner. Perhaps after all he had been hasty, Frank thought. He was so sensitive about the brand of the prison he carried about with him. The shame of it was always with him. Anyway, it could not hurt talking to this man, and it would help pass the time. He allowed himself to be persuaded, and half reluctantly dropped into the seat.

"Say, that's friendly," commented the stranger, with a sharp, sidelong glance at Frank's strong profile. "There's just one thing I got set against this country. It's a hell of a ways between cities. Maybe you don't get that across in England."

"I've never been in England," Frank admitted.

"Ah. Maybe States?"

Frank nodded. And the man laughed.

"The land of Freedom, Graft and Finance."

"Yes, it's an odd mixture," agreed Frank. "It's also a land of slavery. A queer contradiction, but nevertheless true. Three parts of the people are held in bondage to the other fourth, who represent Capital."

The stranger stirred and settled himself. He gazed keenly into his companion's face.

"Guess you were one of the 'three parts,' and found the fourth—oppressive."

Frank shifted his position uneasily. Then with a sudden curious abandonment he spread his hands out.

"Say," he cried, his cheeks flushing, "I don't know what makes me talk to you—a stranger. You're the first man who has wanted to speak to me since—I came out. I know you've spotted my cropped head, so what's the use of trying to deny it. Yes, I've found it, I suppose. But not in the States. Just right here in Canada, where things are much the same. I've just come out of Alston Penitentiary. I was sentenced wrongfully to five years, and now, at the end of one of them they've found out my innocence, and given me a free pardon—for not being guilty."

"A free pardon?" The stranger's eyes were reading his companion through and through.

"Yes, a free pardon for an offence I never committed," Frank went on, with bitter indignation. "It doesn't matter how or where it happened. But the whole thing was worked. I mean my trial, by a man of—well, one of the millionaire class—one of the other 'fourth.' Perhaps you'll understand now why I hated you staring at me."

The stranger nodded sympathetically.

"Guess I'm real sorry," he said.

Frank shook his head.

"It doesn't matter—now. It's done me good to tell—somebody. See." He drew out his prison discharge and showed it to his companion, who read it over carefully. "You don't need to take my word. That'll tell you all you need to know."

The other looked up.

"Frank Smith?" he said.

"Frank Burton's my name. I used the other so as to keep it from folks I didn't want to know about it."

"I see." The stranger was studying the clean cut of the ingenuous face beside him. "And now they'll know—I s'pose?"

"They've found out for themselves." The youngster's blue eyes were shadowed in gloom.

"Ah!" The other glanced out of the window a moment. "And—what are you going to do? Go back to—'em?"

The gloomy blue eyes were turned away. Frank was staring introspectively down the aisle of the car.

"No," he said at last. "I'm not going back to them." Then he sat up and looked at his companion earnestly. "To go back would mean to become one of the other 'fourth.' The ranks of the submerged three-quarters is my future. I've learned a lot in the last twelve months. Say, have you ever been inside a prison.

The stranger's sharp eyes lit with a brief smile. It was not a really pleasant face with its narrow eyes; nor was it a pleasant smile. He shook his head.

"I've seen 'em—from the outside. I'm not yearning to get a peek inside."

Frank looked disappointed.

"It's a pity," he said. "You see, you won't understand just how I see things. Do you know, the prisons are just full to overflowing with folks who'd be free to-day—if it weren't for the existence of that other 'fourth'? Oh, I don't mean they've been deliberately put away by the wealthy folk. I'm just learning that one of the greatest causes of all crime, is that, under present conditions, there isn't enough to go round."

The stranger's smile had become more encouraging.

"And the cure for it is—Socialism, eh?

Frank started. Then he nodded.

"I suppose that's what folks would call it. I call it Brotherhood and Equality."

"Go a step further," said the other. "It's that 'fourth,' we are talking about, who get rich and live on the efforts of the worker whom they sweat and crush into the very ground over which their automobiles roll. Put it in plain words, man. It is the worker, the poor wretch that just manages to scrape existence by grinding toil, who feeds the rich and makes possible the degrading luxury of their lives. And when the first hope of youth gets swamped by the grind of their labors, and they see their equally wretched wives and hungry children going without the barest necessities of life, and before them lies nothing but the dreary road of incessant toil, with no earthly chance of bettering themselves, then they grow desperate, and help to fill those hells of despair we call penitentiaries. That's what you've realized in prison."

Frank stared at the man. The force of his manner was such as to carry absolute conviction of his personal feelings upon this matter, feelings which also lay so deep in the heart of the ex-convict. He wondered at the strange chance which had brought him into contact with a man who shared these new feelings and beliefs of his. Could it be——?

"You believe that way, too?" he asked eagerly.

At that moment a waiter from the dining-car entered the coach.

"First call for dinner! First call for dinner!" He passed down the car issuing his invitation in high, nasal tones.

The stranger fumbled in his waistcoat pockets, and, as the

waiter passed, he produced his card, and held it out toward his companion.

"Say," he observed, lapsing once more into his more genial manner. "Guess you'll be yearning for a billet when you get along to Toronto. Just keep that by you, and when you're needing one, come and look me up. We're always needing recruits for our work. I'll take it kindly if you'll eat with me right now."

Frank took the card and read the name on it—

MR. AUSTIN LEYBURN,

2012 MORDAUNT AVENUE, TORONTO, ONT.

President of the Agricultural Helpers' Society of Canada.
Gen. Sec. Bonded Railroaders.
Asst.-Gen. Sec. Associated Freighters' Combine.

CHAPTER V

A YOUNG GIRL'S PURPOSE

WITH her determined little chin thrust into the palm of her hand, and her elbow propped upon the window ledge of the railroad car, Phyllis made a delightful picture of country simplicity. She was dressed in a plain gown of some soft, dark blue material, and flung back from her shoulders was a heavy, plaid-lined cape, a garment she had borrowed for the journey. On the seat in front of her was a well-worn suit case of cheap compressed cane. It had evidently seen much service, though such service could hardly have been given in the city world toward which she was speeding. Reposing on top of this was her black felt hat. Here, again, her western farm upbringing was evidenced. It was a mixture, contrived out of a man's prairie hat into something of that modern product affected by young girls, beneath which its wearer reveals little but nose and chin. It was Phyllis's "best," and she rather liked it.

But she was quite unconscious of the country brand she bore. She was at all times unconscious of herself, in spite

of her youth. Yet she attracted a good deal of notice among her fellow-passengers.

A commercial drummer had vainly striven for hours to attract her attention, his florid face set ready at a moment's notice to wreath itself into an engaging smile, should she chance to glance in his direction.

Then, too, a youth, in the company of an elderly female relative, had gone through a severe process of neck wringing, several seats in front of her, in the vain hope that her interest in the absurd fields of wheat through which they were passing might abate in his favor.

Besides these it was a curious fact that this particular car demanded so much attention from the train crew. One official bore down on her, and, with unusual courtesy, asked her if he should open a window near her to cool the air. Having achieved his purpose of receiving smiling thanks, he added a few remarks, passed on, and another came along and threatened pleasantly to close it, as he was sure she was in a draught. A third brought her a pillow and refused to take money for it, the significance of which left her wholly unconscious.

But the guard. Well, the guard seemed to have nothing in the world to do but examine her ticket. The railroad officials certainly did their very best for her.

Through it all, the girl's whole interest seemed to lay in the wonderful cloth of gold spread over the world through which they were passing. That and its trimmings in the shape of farm houses, small settlements, townships just starting, verdant bluffs and gleaming rivers, all of which glided swiftly by, a delightful panorama before her wondering eyes, as the transcontinental mail swept across the prairie lands upon its east-bound journey.

It was all fresh to her, but none of it was new. She had been brought up in a corner of this very wheat world, so she knew it all. Sometimes it was grander and looked more prosperous, sometimes it was smaller and poorer. But the method of it was always the same.

Still, she was traveling abroad for the first time in her young life, and she wanted to see everything there was to see. Thus, she had traveled for more than two whole days, nor had she yet exhausted the resources of Canada's great

granary. Indian Head, Moosejaw, Regina, Moosemin, Brandon, all these places, miles and miles apart, had vanished into the dim distance behind her, but still the cloth of golden wheat remained, as she knew it would remain until Winnipeg was reached.

Funds had not permitted her the luxury of a "sleeper," so she had faced the discomforts of long days and longer nights in the ordinary day car. But with her heart set upon a definite purpose such things were no real hardships to Phyllis. Just now her one desire in life was to reach Winnipeg, so nothing else mattered.

It was nearly noon when the conductor of the train entered the car for perhaps the tenth time that morning. Phyllis saw him moving down the aisle, and, from force of habit, got her ticket ready. But the amiable man spared her this time. He hurried along toward her, and, with the sigh of an overworked man, dropped into the seat beside her suit case.

"Guess you'll soon be in Winnipeg, now," he observed, having learned her anxiety to reach her destination some twenty or thirty visits to her before.

Phyllis smiled, and her whole face lit up. The conductor grinned his pleasure at the sight.

"I'm so glad," the girl sighed. "Still, I've had a real pleasant journey," she added quickly. "You folks have been very kind to me."

The man's delight was written all over his face.

"Why, that's good of you. But 'tain't just nothin'. Gals travelin' on their lonesome, it ain't all pie for 'em. We just like to do our best—when they ain't on the grouch."

Phyllis had abandoned her study of the view.

"I haven't been a grouch, have I?" she demanded.

"Never in your life. Say—you couldn't grouch. 'Tain't your nature."

Phyllis became aware of the "drummer." His grin was in full blast. But she quickly ignored him.

"I s'pose you know Winnipeg well?" she hazarded to her companion, with some eagerness.

"Live there," the man replied, comprehensively.

"Ah, I'm glad. Maybe you know Grand Avenue?"

The man's eyes opened wide.

"Sure I know Grand Avenoo. That's where the big fellers live. All small houses. Sort o' Fifth Avenoo, Noo York." Then he grinned. "Say, you ain't figurin' on a hotel in Grand Avenoo?"

Phyllis flushed.

"Oh, no," she disclaimed hurriedly. "I just want to get there to—to see a lady who lives there."

The conductor nodded his understanding.

"Sure," he said. "Service. Domestic."

Phyllis's flush deepened.

"Oh, no," she cried. "I'm—I'm just on a visit."

The conductor realized his mistake, and tried to glide over the fence.

"If you were to tell me the part of Grand Avenoo you're needing, maybe I could give you the right surface car to take."

"That would be very kind," Phyllis said earnestly. Then her dark brows drew together perplexedly. "It's rather difficult," she went on. "You see, I don't really know just whereabouts Mrs. Hendrie lives."

"Mrs. Hendrie, d'you say, miss? Mrs. Alexander Hendrie?"

"Yes, yes. That's the lady," Phyllis cried eagerly. "Do you know where her house is?"

"Gee!"

"What did you say? I didn't——"

"Beg pardon, miss—I—I just said 'Gee!'" The man rose from his seat rather hurriedly. "You see, I didn't just figure you were goin' to Mrs. Alexander Hendrie. You see, Mr. Hendrie is just about the biggest man in the country, and—well——"

Phyllis laughed.

"And it seemed queer me going to see them. Of course it does," she went on, to help the man's confusion. "But if you'll tell me best how to find Grand Avenue, why, you'll be doing me a real kindness, just one more."

The girl's tact had prompt effect.

"I'll sure be most pleased, miss," the conductor said, with some emphasis on the last word. "You just go right out of the booking hall at the depot, and get on to the first Main Street car you see. It'll take you along up to Grand. Just

give word to the ticket man, an' he'll see you get off right. We'll be in in less than two hours. We're plumb on time."

He moved away quickly, and Phyllis vaguely understood that his going had something to do with the fact that she was going to see the wife of one of the biggest men in the country. But she quite missed the necessity for the railroader's exchange of attitude.

Grand Avenue was bathed in sunlight when Phyllis stepped off the car and looked about her. Automobiles and pair-horse carriages sped upon their dazzling ways down the great wide road with a speed and frequency that, for some moments, left the country girl almost dazed. Her unaccustomed eyes were wide and wondering, and she clung to her cane suit case as though for support against the overwhelming tide of traffic.

After a while, either the stream slackened, or her nerves became more accustomed, for she made a dash for the sidewalk, and reached safety once more. Then further dismay attacked her. She gazed along at the great detached mansions, which lined the avenue, and the sight gave her understanding of the train conductor's suggestion that she was about to enter domestic service. It was in one of these splendid palaces, she thought, that Mrs. Hendrie lived, and probably one of the biggest. For a moment she looked down at her suit case as though she hated it.

Her weakness, however, was quickly passed. She remembered the object of her visit, and clenched her small white teeth. All she cared for in the world was at stake in this desperate visit, and nothing should daunt her.

A large policeman was passing. Noting the girl's evident hesitation he slackened his pace. He was a genially rubicund specimen of the force, and inspired confidence. Phyllis promptly set her suit case down, drew a letter from her pocket-book and went up to him.

"Will you tell me in which direction that number is, sir?" she inquired, awed by the man's authority as she held up the address for his inspection.

The officer's bulging eyes surveyed her from head to foot. That "sir" had tickled his vanity, and he approved of her.

"One thousand and one?" he said. "Why, that's Alex-

ander Hendrie's house. Right here behind you—er—miss. That's Mr. Hendrie's house."

Phyllis thanked him warmly. Then she went back to her suit case, picked it up, and made for the house with a rapidly beating heart. It was almost as if everything had been made especially easy for her, and, in spite of her growing nervousness, she was very thankful.

The house was well back from the road. It was approached by a short, unenclosed carriage sweep, lined on each side by smooth turf, dotted with shrubs and young trees. The air of wealth was conveyed in the splendidly kept condition of everything rather than any ostentatious display. The house itself was a modern production of decorative architecture, built of massive, beautifully cut gray stone. The entrance door was beneath a glass and wrought-iron shelter, which stretched out across the drive and was supported on massive wrought-iron columns of exquisite design.

It was not without many heart quakings that Phyllis ascended the white marble steps and pressed the great button of the electric bell. Nor were these lessened when the door was opened with magical abruptness, and she found herself gazing up at the liveried footman in wonder and dismay.

The man's cold survey of her was disheartening. Plainly as looks could speak, he regarded her visit as an impertinent intrusion, while he waited for her to speak.

It was a critical moment, and Phyllis knew it. The situation demanded all her courage. Assuming a decision which quite belied her real feelings, she endeavored to overawe the man, quite forgetful of the strange hat and stranger costume she was arrayed in; to say nothing of the deplorable suit case.

"I want to see Mrs. Hendrie," she demanded shortly.

The man's reply was slow in coming. He devoured her with eyes which plainly conveyed a definite and contemptuous refusal.

"Can't be done," he said at last, and prepared to close the door.

But Phyllis had not traveled all these hundreds of miles to be defeated by a mere footman.

"Oh, yes, it can," she declared tartly. "And you'll do best if you remember that you're speaking to a lady. Mrs. Hendrie is expecting me. Please to tell her Miss Phyllis Raysun is here—from Gleber."

The absurd dignity of this quaint figure was not without its effect. The man's manner underwent a slight change, but he still remained barring the way. At his sign a boy in uniform stepped forward from some dark corner where he had been lurking unseen by Phyllis. He stood ready with a silver tray in his hand.

"Inquire if Mrs. Hendrie is at home," said the footman loftily. "If she is, will she receive Miss—er—Phyllis Raysun?"

The boy remained with his tray held out. Phyllis was at a loss. Then she nodded.

"Yes. That's right," she said, failing to understand the silent demand for a card.

With a smile, which somehow added further to the girl's angry feelings, the youth hurried away. But the man still kept her waiting on the step.

Without knowing what she ought to have expected, Phyllis felt that she was being treated shamefully. She knew that these liveried underlings were treating her as if she were some undesirable tramp. It was quite infuriating. But with so much at stake she felt it safest not to display too much resentment, so she choked back her indignation and accepted the affront.

Then quite suddenly a wonderful change came upon the scene. A change that was evidently utterly unexpected by the churlish man-servant.

There was a sound of rustling skirts hurrying downstairs. Then some one brushed the man aside and seized Phyllis's two ungloved hands, one of which still held the deplorable suit case.

"My dear, my dear, however did you get here?"

It was Monica. Then she turned angrily upon the discomforted footman as she drew the girl into the house.

"How dare you keep this lady standing out on the doorstep? How dare you? It's an outrage. It is an outrage I won't permit in my house. I never heard of such a thing."

Then she turned upon the scared-faced boy, waiting just behind her.

"Tell the housekeeper I wish to see her in the library in an hour's time." Then, in a moment, she was back again to Phyllis. "Come along, dear. Come up to my room, and get your things off. Henson will see to your grip."

But Phyllis clung to the suit case, which she was growing to hate more and more every moment. She was sure now that it had had something to do with the rude treatment she had been subjected to.

"But I—I can carry it, M—Mrs. Hendrie," she cried, the inevitable "mam" nearly slipping out in spite of her best efforts.

Monica laughed. She remembered how she, herself, had felt once upon a time facing an army of servants.

"Very well, dear," she said gently, "but come along."

She took the bewildered girl by the arm, and hurried her through the great entrance hall. Then up the wide staircase, and, having left the sharp-eared servants well behind, opened out a battery of eager questions.

"How ever did you get here all by yourself from that little far-away farm of yours?" she demanded. "How—how dared you attempt such a thing, my dear?" she went on, with genuine concern. "You shouldn't have done it. You really shouldn't, without letting me know, so that I could have arranged for your comfort."

They had reached the first floor, and Monica's arm was about the girl's supple waist.

"I never heard of such a thing," she hurried on, pushing open the door of her boudoir. "Weren't you frightened to death? How—how ever did you manage to find this house—you, who've never been away from your prairie home in your life?"

"I—I had to come, mam," Phyllis cried. "I—I hope you're not angry, but I just had to come. I got a letter from—from Frank, and he told me he was never coming back to me, and was going to—to—enlist—or something, in the army of workers and give his life to bettering their lot, and—and a lot of other silly nonsense like that. And—and I just had to come and

see you — since I knew that — that you loved him, too."

There were tears crowding the girl's beautiful, appealing eyes as she looked up into Monica's face.

Monica stooped and kissed her quite suddenly. Then she unfastened and removed the unsightly cape and took the offending suit case from her. She laid them aside, and then strove to reassure this child, who, though she had only seen her once before in her life, and only knew her through writing to her, somehow seemed to have become a part of her life.

"I'm so glad you came to me, Phyl," she cried. "There's so much to say—so much for us both to think of. Oh, my dear, my dear, my heart is broken. I don't know what to think, or what to do. My poor, poor boy."

An hour passed. The housekeeper waited to see Mrs. Hendrie in the library, but she did not come. Two hours passed. Monica and Phyllis still remained together in the former's room. As Monica had said, there was much for both to think of. Again she poured out the dreadful story of Frank's disaster. She was thankful, too, for the girl's sympathetic ears. It eased her own feelings, and helped her to think more clearly, which she had not been able to do since receiving Frank's curt note refusing her money. But at last there was nothing more left to tell, and Monica broke down, weeping over the havoc she felt that she alone had wrought.

"Oh, Phyl, Phyl," she cried desperately. "It is all my doing; all through my wretched selfishness. You—even you can't blame my husband. The fault was mine alone."

Phyllis's dark eyes were hard as she flung in her denial.

"But I do blame him," she cried. "Even if Frank had been guilty it was a wicked, cruel thing to do. I can't help it if it hurts you, Mrs. Hendrie. I do certainly blame your husband."

Monica shook her head.

"He was in a fury of jealousy, and no man is quite sane under such circumstances." Phyllis's challenge had given Monica the firmness of decision, which, in her grief, she had utterly lacked. "I *am* to blame. I can see it all now. Had

I never lied to Frank in my ridiculous sense of duty to my dead sister, and my selfish desire to marry my husband; had I never told the boy that I was his mother—this would never have happened. In his great goodness and chivalry, the poor boy sacrificed himself for what he believed was my honor. It—is—too terrible. Just God, what a punishment for my lies. Never, never, never, as long as I live, can I forgive myself. And now? Oh, what can I do? Whatever can we do?"

Monica's tears flowed fast, and in sympathy for the suffering woman Phyllis wept, too. Her anger, her resentment against those who had injured her love were powerless to resist the appeal of this woman's grief. However she loved Frank, she remembered that Monica loved him, too. All his life she had struggled and slaved for him.

But she was there for a greater purpose than to help another woman in her suffering. She was there to help the man she loved. More than that, she was there to win him back to herself, to that happiness she believed she alone could give him. She knew him so well. She felt in her simple way that he needed her, in spite of his long, long letter giving her back her promise, and full of his unalterable resolve to put his past and all that belonged to it, behind him forever. She intended to pit herself against his desperate purpose. She was determined to restore the old Frank she knew, the old Frank she loved better than her life.

"What can you do?" she cried, a glowing light of strength and love shining in her beautiful, half-tearful eyes. "What can we do? Why, everything. But we're not going to do it by writing letters, mam. You love him? You? And you can just sit at home right here, and hand him words written on paper, and push money into the envelope, money which means nothing to either of you, when he comes out of the prison you helped to send him to? Oh, mam, mam, how could you? Your place was at the gates of Alston prison as it was mine, if I had known, like you did. It was for us to have been along there, ready to reach out, and—and help him. What can we do? What can I do? I'll tell you. Oh, I know it's not for me to tell you things. Maybe I'm young and foolish. Maybe I don't know much.

I'm just not going to write my Frank in answer to his—his nonsensical stuff. But I won't take back my promise to be his wife. I'm—I'm going to marry him—because I know he wants me, and I want him. Oh, no, I'm not going to marry a man who gets worrying to make strikes and things, and calls it helping labor. I'm not going to marry a man who's always making trouble in the world, who leaves kiddies starving for what he calls a 'principle,' and most folks generally—miserable. But I'm going to marry my Frank, and I'm going right on to Toronto to find him—if I have to walk there."

The girl finished up breathlessly. All her love and courage were shining in her eyes. Monica had been held spellbound by the force and determination underlying every unconsidered word Phyllis uttered, and now she sprang from her seat, caught in the rush of the other's enthusiasm.

"Oh Phyl, Phyl," she cried, catching the girl by the shoulders, and looking down into her ardent face. "You brave, brave child. I never thought. I could never have thought, fool that I am. Yes, yes, we will go to him. Not you alone. I will go, too. You are the bravest, wisest child in the world, and—I love you for it."

CHAPTER VI

IN TORONTO

The street cars hummed in the still summer air. The sun awnings were stretched out from the endless array of stores, across the super-heated sidewalk. A busy life perspired beneath them. Toronto's central shopping areas were always crowded about midday, not with the smart woman shopper, but with the lunching population of the commercial houses.

It was more than a month since Frank's memorable journey from the hopeless precincts of Alston to one of Canada's gayest cities; a month during which he had found his days far easier than he expected, if more full of the responsibilities of life. From the moment of his meeting with Austin

Leyburn he had permitted himself a looking forward, if not with anything approaching youthful hope and confidence, at least to a life full of that work which his understanding suggested to him might serve to deaden bitter memories, and help him to face a useful future.

His new aspirations, his new convictions, sprang from a simple, impulsive heart rather than from any deep study of Socialistic doctrine. He had no logic on the matters of his beliefs, he needed none. It was sufficient that he had seen, had felt, and he hugged to himself the thoughts thus inspired.

For the moment the man Leyburn, with his narrow eyes, his purposeful face, was something little less than a god to young Frank. Here was a champion of those very people whom he believed needed all the help forthcoming. Here was a man who, from sheer belief in his own principles, had devoted himself, nay, perhaps, sacrificed himself, to those very ideals which he, Frank, had only just awakened to. His official positions in the organized societies of labor surely testified to the sincerity of his purpose. Thus it was certainly the work of Providence that he, Frank, had been thrown into such contact at the moment of his need.

On that eventful train journey, Leyburn had promised to enroll him among the workers for the good of the submerged ranks of labor. Moreover he had proved as good as his word. He had done more. For some unexplained reason he took Frank into his own personal office, keeping him under his direct supervision, associating with him, and treating him to a confidence that was by no means usual in one of the most powerful heads of the labor movement in Canada.

It was a strange association, these two. On the one hand a man of great organizing powers, of keen, practical understanding of Socialistic principles; and, on the other, a youth of lofty ideals which had little enough to do with the bitter class hatred belonging to the sordid modern product of Socialism. Yet the older man's interest was very evident, and was displayed in many different ways. He frequently lunched with his protégé, and never failed to take him to any demonstration of labor at which it was his duty to speak.

Frank responded readily to this kindly treatment. Nor did it ever occur to him to wonder at it. So it came about, that, bit by bit, this kindly man with the narrow eyes and hard smile, drew from him the complete story of his life's disaster.

It was on the occasion when the last detail of the story was passionately poured into his apparently sympathetic ears that Austin Leyburn treated his protégé to something of his platform oratory.

"Out of evil comes good—sometimes," he said, with a twisted, satirical smile. "You certainly have been the victim of the class against which all our efforts are directed. Think of it," he went on, thrusting his elbows upon the luncheon table which stood between them—they were in the fly-ridden precincts of the cheap restaurant which Leyburn always affected—and raising his voice to a denunciatory pitch. "Think of it. Every man with power to think, with power to work, who comes within the web of this wealthy man you speak of—whoever he is—is open to the possibilities for evil of his accumulations of wealth. That man, a millionaire, openly confesses to being able to buy the law sufficiently to legally crush the moral, almost the physical life out of those who offend him." Then he smiled whimsically. "Can you wonder at the class hatred existing, and of which I know you do not wholly approve?" Then he shrugged, as though to dismiss the matter. "As I said, good out of evil—sometimes. But for that experience you would undoubtedly have joined the ranks of the oppressors and assimilated their creed."

"Yes, yes," cried Frank eagerly. "I see all that. I see the iniquity of it all that such tyranny should be possible. I agree entirely. It is against the very principles of all creation that any one man should possess such power. No man, woman, or child is safe with such possibilities in our midst. But this class hatred. The opposition of labor is not directed sufficiently against the principle. It is directed against the individual, and so becomes class hatred."

"Remember you are dealing with human nature," Leyburn objected. "When such forces as we control are put into active protest against a principle, the principle must become merged in the individual who represents it. It is the

tangible evidence which an ignorant mass of labor needs of the existence of offense against the principle which causes the bitterness of its lot."

"My objection is against that fact," Frank persisted, in the blindness of enthusiasm. "Class hatred! It is dreadful. Christ never preached class hatred; and no man who ever walked this earth had a greater understanding of real life than He. Listen, I read in one of your books, written by a man reputed to be a great thinker, that—if the working men and women of the world were wiped out, capital and its class would become useless, paralyzed. He also said that if, on the other hand, those who represent capital were wiped out, if all but the working men and women were exterminated, the world would still go on undisturbed, because of the worker left behind."

Leyburn nodded.

"That is one of the strongest bases of the labor movement. Why should the man or woman who lives by the sweat of others enjoy the luxury which is denied to the people who make that luxury possible? Is the argument not perfectly, humanly just?"

Frank leaned back in his hard chair. This man was damping some of his enthusiasm by the argument which seemed to him as purely selfish as were the existing conditions of the methods of capital.

"Then the husbandman in the vineyard was all wrong?" he demanded.

"On the contrary, he was quite right—if he could get no more than the penny he engaged for," replied Leyburn cynically.

Frank returned again to the attack.

"Now you are preaching for the worker the very methods of present-day capital. You are telling him to—grab."

"So long as capital—grabs, labor must do likewise. Unfortunately this is an age of grab, and until evolution carries it away, like any other pestilential influence, we must all grab, or die in the gutter."

Frank shook his head.

"No, no," he cried desperately. "I can't believe it. This war of classes is all wrong. It is against all the ethics of brotherhood. It is the war of body against brain. Leave

out the individual and stick to the principle. If the working class were wiped out to-morrow the brain, which is really the life of the world, would only change its tactics. After a brief stagnation it would evolve a fresh condition of things. It would throw itself into the necessary work, and, after a while, its powers would contrive a means whereby the world's work would still go forward. On the other hand, if the great minds, the thinking minds of those who represent capital, were wiped out, after a brief spell of chaos, the vitality of the body would recreate a guiding system, and things would become the same as they were before. There would again be capital and labor, with its endless problem. All that we can humanly demand is equality and brotherhood for the human race in their various conditions of life. If a man works his best he must be able to enjoy life as he sees life. The rest belongs to a Divine Power over which we can have no control. The world's goods must be proportionately divided, according to all requirements. Nor do we all need the same, because of that unequal distribution by divine hand of the power to do. Oh, maybe I cannot make it plain. But I can see it all, if only man will work in a common interest, as I feel sure he was intended to do. It is a government of common good we need. One that will provide as well for the laborer as the thinker. They are two portions of one whole, without either of which the other cannot exist. Sever them, destroy either, and the lot of the other is to be deplored."

Frank waited with flushed face and anxious eyes for the other's reply.

Leyburn's cynical eyes looked up from the stained tablecloth on which the remains of the meal were still scattered.

"And in the meantime?" he inquired.

"What do you mean?"

"How are you going to achieve this government, this good and merciful government that is going to provide for us, each according to our needs? By sitting down and submitting to the sweaters who rule the lives of the present-day laboring world, making its condition just what their own quality of selfishness demands, just because the Divine Hand has bestowed upon them a greater power to think than It has upon the worker? I tell you, boy, we are fighting for

all that which you have outlined; and we are fighting—which is the only way. I said that this was an age of grab—and, as far as I can see, it is a pestilential influence that must remain for years to come. The brain must be forced to yield up its selfish desires by the body; it will never be persuaded. You used the analogy. I will use it, too. As you say, the brain represents the thinkers. In human life the brain thinks, it is selfish in its desires, and its desires grow. They frequently grow beyond the endurance of the body, and finally it submits the body to such conditions of disease that at last the poor stricken thing rebels. Harmony and well-being cannot endure in human life with the domination of any one part of it. Capital is dominating labor now, so that the disease of hopelessness has spread to every section. Life is a burden. Therefore labor has rebelled, is rebelling, will continue to rebel, until capital is abolished and the harmony of equality is restored. Believe me, I am only viewing your ideals through practical eyes. Come, my boy, we must to work again. There is that case of tyranny to be looked into. The discharge of that fireman for drinking when off duty on the North Saskatchewan Railroad. There is also the question of colored agricultural workers to be considered. You, my friend, are young. You are enthusiastic and idealistic, and I like you for it. But you will soon see that that which a long experience has taught me is right."

Leyburn rose from his seat and beckoned the waiter. He settled the bill, while Frank picked up his hat. The youngster had no longer need to press it down to his ears. His hair was rapidly growing to that luxuriant, wavy mass, which had always been Monica's pride.

At the door of the restaurant, Leyburn turned to him with his peculiarly ungracious smile, and sniffed the sickening atmosphere of hot food.

"We've satisfied our appetites, and now we hate the smell," he said, with a laugh. "Human nature is ungrateful. By the way, you'd best go on to the Saskatchewan Railroad offices and ask for that report they promised to send me. I'll go back to the office." Then, as an afterthought: "Say," he added, with a laugh, "I'm going to send you up West later. Along the line. To do some—talking.

But you'll need to cut all that stuff right out. I mean the ideal racket. So long."

He turned sharply away, and hurried down the heat-laden street.

Left alone, Frank looked after him. He shook his head.

"He's a good feller," he said to himself. "But he's wrong—dead wrong—in some things."

At that moment somebody bumped into him, and he turned to apologize. Seeing it was a woman, he raised his hat. Then an exclamation, half joyous, half of dismay, broke from him.

"Phyl!" he cried. "You? In Toronto?"

In her turn the girl started and stared.

"Frank!" she cried incredulously. Then, regardless of the passers-by: "Thank God, I've found you! Oh, Frank, I'm so—so glad. We have been hunting Toronto these weeks; and now—now——"

"We?"

The girl's delight and evident love almost seemed to have passed Frank by. With a rush all the old pain of parting from her, all the dreary heartache he had endured when writing his farewell to her, was with him once more, as his troubled eyes searched the sweet face looking so radiantly up into his.

"Yes, 'we,' dear."

Phyllis, her pretty face wreathed in a happy, confident little smile, was studying him closely.

"Well?" she cried, as the great fellow stared back at her, rather like a simple babe.

Frank tried to pull himself together. It was like the ponderous shake of a St. Bernard dog, rousing himself to activity.

"I don't know what to say or do." The man's dilemma was struggling with the joy of this unexpected reunion. "Why have you come here? Oh, Phyl, it is so hard. It has been so terribly hard. I tried to explain it all in my letter, I never thought——"

The girl nodded. Not for a moment did she permit any other emotion than her delight at seeing him again, appear in her smiling eyes. She tilted her head slightly on one side, so that the shadow of her wide-brimmed hat was removed

from her face. Frank became aware of the movement, also of the hat. He also became aware of the smartly tailored costume she was wearing, even the pointed toes of her exquisite shoes, and the white kid gloves upon her hands. She intended him to notice these things.

"Oh, Frank," she cried, deliberately ignoring his protest, "Toronto's just the loveliest place ever to buy dress fixings. Mrs. Hendrie has just made me buy and buy, till —well, till I don't know how much she's spent on me. You see," she went on naïvely, "she said I just couldn't get hunting my beau in Toronto with hayseed sticking all over my hair. Don't you think I—I look better this way?"

This strange child from a "way-off" western farm had her own methods of campaign. She was playing for a big stake, the biggest she could think of—the man she loved.

Frank breathed a deep sigh.

"You—you just look wonderful, Phyl," he cried, for a moment all else smothered in the background.

"True? Sure?"

"True? Say, you just couldn't look more lovely," the boy cried.

Phyllis laughed.

"Then come right along. See, we're bumping folks, standing here. I'm going to take you to where your—where Mrs. Hendrie is waiting for you. The——"

But the mention of Monica left Frank once more alive to realities.

"No, no, Phyl," he cried. "It is useless. Don't you understand? I love my—I love Mon as dearly as ever son loved a mother, but—the barrier has been set up between us, and can never be removed. Oh, believe me, it is no resentment, or bitterness against her. She just belongs to a different world from mine—now. It would give her pain. I know what she would say—and I know what I must say."

In spite of all his protests, Frank was walking beside Phyllis, moving unquestioningly in the direction she selected.

The girl looked round laughingly. Phyllis had never perhaps smiled so joyously, so sweetly as she was smiling now. But every look, every word she spoke, was full of definite purpose.

"I haven't recovered from the shock you handed me—

in that—that letter," she said, without a shadow of distress in her smiling eyes. "I haven't, true as true. Say, I just kind of wonder if you've got half a notion how it feels for a girl to be thrown over by letter? Say, I just won't be thrown over by—by letter. That's why I've come here to Toronto. I've come right here so you can tell me with your own two very determined lips, I'm not wanted. When you've told me that I'm not wanted, that you just don't love me any more, then I'm going right away to Gleber, and get on with my plowing. I'll just pack up all the elegant suits Mrs. Hendrie's bought me, and never see them again. Then I'll fix myself up in black and bugles—whatever they are—and be a widow woman for the rest of my life. Now, truth! You don't love me—any more; and you don't want me?"

Just for a moment the girl's mask was dropped as she made her final demand.

It was only for a moment, but long enough for Frank to see the depth of her love for him shining in her dark eyes. The desire then and there to take her in his arms, and throw every resolution to the winds, was well-nigh overpowering, but he put it from him, and the effort left him speechless.

"Frank?" she urged.

But still the man remained silent.

"Do you know, dear, you'd have been more merciful if you'd brutally struck me in the face with your great big fist, instead of sending me that letter. You see, you'd sure have left me senseless."

The subtle appeal was too much for the man. His face flushed with a shame that swept through his heart.

"But what could I do, Phyl? I had to tell you. I had to give you—your freedom. You could never marry a—convict."

Phyllis's mask of lightness returned to her face. She meant to hit this man she loved, hard. It took all her courage to do it, and the only possible chance she had was to laugh with it.

"A convict?" she cried. "Oh, Frank, I could marry a convict far, far easier than a—present-day Socialist."

The thrust drove straight home, and, witnessing the havoc she had wrought, the girl consoled herself with the thought

that hers had been the plunging of the surgeon's knife that the healing of this man might be the surer, the more complete.

"Phyl!"

The man's look was one of dreadful pain. He felt as if every ideal and honest feeling he had ever had, had fallen upon him, crushing him beneath its burden. Phyl's ridicule was worse, far worse than any suffering he had endured, however unjust.

"You can't—you don't mean that," he cried hoarsely. "No, no, Phyl, you don't mean it. You——"

"But I do—I do," the girl cried, with sudden passion. "Oh, I know you've suffered. God only knows just how you've suffered! And since I've heard all you've gone through, I've suffered every moment of it with you. Yes, I know I've hurt you now, and I meant to hurt you—not because you hurt me, not because of all you wrote me in your letter, but because I want to tell you all I feel about—about this new life you figure to mix up with. Frank, your own honest notions are just too big for words. They're like you—all of them. But how—how are you going to carry them out? Say, I'll tell you. Maybe I'm just seeing things as they happen, and not as folks guess they're going to figger out. You're going to help fix things right by tying yourself to the ranks of labor, so as to fight capital. That's how you're going to bring about brotherly and sisterly love in the world! By fighting! Say, you said you were going to enlist in the army. You have. And it's a fighting army, facing all the horrors of a war far more dreadful than the life-and-death struggle of nations. Do you need me to tell you of the wretched, self-seeking leaders of the working men? The men who lead them like a flock of silly sheep so they may personally prosper and feed on them? Do you need me to tell you, what every paper in the world tells you, of the awful sufferings the helpless women and kiddies go through? All just because these grabbing leaders, yearning for publicity and power, order their men-folk to stop work, and resort to violence for a few odd cents more pay, or because some wretched scallawag, who richly deserves it, no doubt, has fallen under the rules of his employers. That's not your Socialism, if I

know you. Oh, this horrible, horrible bitterness and hatred going on everywhere about us. Why should it be? You ask that, too, and you get right up against one little fact of life—the power of money—and guess that's the root of it. It isn't! It isn't! I tell you there's just one cause. It's selfishness. It's the selfishness of one class just as sure as it's the selfishness of another. And they bring all sorts of arguments about principle to prop themselves up on. There's no principle about it. It's just self, self, self, all the time. Everybody wants something they don't honestly earn. And when they can't get it, if they think they're strong enough, they just start right out to fight for it, like a lot of savages, while those who look to them for support and comfort are left to starve, and put up with all the horrors caused by savage passions, inflamed to frenzy by those leaders who are the only creatures to obtain worldly advantage and benefit from their disgraceful doings. Oh, Frank, it's just awful to think that you have become one of these—these—villains."

The girl's passionate denunciation came to an end just as she halted at the foot of the great flight of steps leading up to the entrance of the Eldorado Hotel. But she waited for no comment from her silent companion. She just glanced up and pointed at the building. Then, with an almost kaleidoscopic return to her lightest, smiling manner, she announced their arrival at their destination.

"Say, Frank," she cried, with an air of absurd importance. "This is my hotel. We've a suite of elegant apartments right on the first floor. And, dear," with a sudden tenderness, "Mrs. Hendrie—Monica—your Mon, who loves you nearly as much as I do, is just waiting right there—for you. You'll come along in?"

Frank looked up into the tenderly pleading eyes, and his last objection melted before them.

He nodded.

CHAPTER VII

THE DECISION

Monica and Frank were alone in the former's private sitting-room at the Eldorado Hotel. Phyllis had conducted him to the door of the room, where she waited until he had passed safely within. Then she discreetly withdrew to pass many anxious moments pacing the narrow limits of her own bedroom on the same floor.

The sitting-room was a large, handsomely furnished apartment with two lofty windows looking out upon the busy street, directly over the hotel's entrance porch. At one of these windows Frank was standing, with his back turned upon the room and the woman who had drawn so near to him. His troubled blue eyes were fixed upon the busy life outside, but it had no interest for him. Whatever he had gone through before, he believed that he was now facing the climax of his life. It had arisen so suddenly, so unexpectedly, as such climaxes do; and it found him ready for impulsive action that had to be controlled.

Monica was just behind him, and a little to one side. One hand was resting upon the cold radiator as though she needed its support. Her beautiful face was drawn, and pale, great dark rings surrounded her eyes. Her age was strongly marked just now, it was even exaggerated, and had somehow communicated itself to her shoulders, which drooped in an unusually hopeless manner.

It had been a long, and for both, a painful interview. It had been a scene of love and humility on the part of the proud wife of Alexander Hendrie, and of affection yet decision, not untouched with bitterness, on the part of the boy who had developed so quickly into a man of responsibility. The mother love had pleaded with a humility that was pathetic, and the man had listened, steeling his heart against the inroads which the sound of that gentle voice made upon his determination.

Never for one moment did he find aught of blame for her. Never did he, by word or look, convey anything but the

love she had always known. How could it be otherwise? Nothing could have broken down a love such as his, founded as it was upon long years of self-sacrificing devotion toward himself. Monica was still to him all she had ever been—his mother.

But now her final appeal, that he should abandon his present life and return to her, had been made, and, as the end came, she handed him a letter in Alexander Hendrie's handwriting.

The letter remained unread in his hands, held limply, a thing apparently of no interest to him.

"Won't you read it, Frank? Won't you read it—for my sake?" Monica urged, after a long, painful silence.

There was something like tears in her voice, and the sound became irresistible to the man.

He sighed, and glanced down at the folded paper.

"Where is the use?" he asked gently. "There can be nothing in it to alter my determination. Oh, Mon, don't you understand? If I can hear you plead and still remain certain my purpose is right, how can anything this man has to say, turn me from it?"

Monica drew a step nearer. Her hand had left the cold iron. Now the other was laid tenderly upon his shoulder.

"I know, I know, Frank," she cried. "But—won't you read it? When you have read it you will understand why I want you to do so. It is the letter of a man with a mind as big as his passions are—violent. It is the letter of a man whose proud head is bowed in the—dust with grief at the wrong he has done to you. If you knew him as I know him, you would realize all that the writing of that letter must have cost him. Were it not that I know something of the great, passionate heart that beats in his body I could not have believed such a letter written by him possible. Oh, Frank, if nothing I can say, can turn you from the purpose of your life, let me plead, as I have never pleaded to any one before, be your just, kindly self for a few moments, and—listen while he speaks to you."

Frank unfolded the letter, and, after a moment's hesitation, withdrew his gaze from the window, and began to read, Monica waited breathlessly. The letter, in a clear, bold handwriting, was without heading or date.

"I cannot begin this with a conventional heading. I cannot expect that you would tolerate any sort of demonstrativeness. Therefore, what I have to say must be short, sincere, and to the point. I am sending this by Monica, to ensure your receiving it, and in the hope that she will persuade you to read it. I can think of only one wrong, ever committed by man, greater than that which I have done to you. The wrong I refer to was done some two thousand years ago. The horror of that crime has remained to those whose forbears committed it, and will remain so long as their lives last. The horror of my crime will so remain with me. This may sound extravagant to you, however bitter your feelings, but you do not know, perhaps you never will know, all that is in my mind as I write. However, that is for me, and it is not easy. The expression of all my regrets would be useless to convey what I feel. Let them pass. There are things I desire to do, and I implore you, as you may hope for future salvation, as you may pity a mind and heart racked with torture, to come back with Monica, and accept an equal partnership in all I have in the world. It is here, waiting for you at all times between now and the day I die. I hope that some day you may learn to forgive the wrongs I have inflicted upon you.

"Alexander Hendrie."

The letter remained in Frank's hand as his eyes were once more lifted to the window. There was a slight change in them, a slight softening in their expression. Monica, watching him, drew a sharp breath. For an instant hope leaped within her, and a whispered urging escaped her.

"Frank!"

The man made no movement, but the softening passed swiftly out of his eyes.

"You will—come?"

He held out the letter in reply.

"Take it, Mon, take it back to him," he said deliberately, yet without harshness. "I will not write a reply, but you can take him this message. The past is over, and, though perhaps it cannot easily be forgotten, I have no longer any feeling about it beyond hatred of the injustice which makes it possible for the weight of one man's wealth to bring about

such persecution as was dealt out to me. Tell him I cannot accept that which he has no right to be able to give. Tell him there are thousands—hundreds of thousands of men and women who could be benefited by that which he would now give to me."

Monica drew back sharply, the caressing weight of her hand slipped from his shoulder.

"You mean that? Oh, no, no, Frank! You cannot answer him like that. It is not you—never, never!"

"That is the answer, dear." Frank had turned from the window, and came towards this woman who had been more than a mother to him. "That is the answer to his letter, and to all that you have asked me. But you are right, it is not I—it is the teaching of the suffering and misery I have witnessed that is speaking, and to that teaching I remain loyal."

"Frank is right, Mrs. Hendrie."

The man looked across the room with a start, and Monica turned abruptly. Phyllis was standing just inside the room with her back to the door she had just closed behind her. She nodded in answer to their looks of surprise, and her eyes were smiling, but with suspicious brightness.

"You're going, Frank?" she demanded. "You're just going right back to those—you've—you've joined?"

The girl's voice was so quiet, so soft. Nor was any of her aching heart permitted to add one touch of appeal to her manner. The man cleared his throat. He averted his eyes.

"Yes, Phyl," he said hoarsely.

He stood there feeling as though he was once more before a tribunal, awaiting sentence. Phyllis had drawn close to Monica's side, and her strong young arm had slipped protectingly about the elder woman's waist. The girl understood her suffering, and her own added to the sympathy of her action.

Her eyes shone up into the man's face. Their brightness was the brightness of tears she would not shed.

"Then—it's 'good-bye'?" she said gently..

The man nodded. He dared not speak until he had full mastery of himself.

Phyllis sighed.

"We came here, Frank, to show you all that was in the

hearts of two women who—who love you," she said slowly. "Maybe we haven't done it well. I can't rightly say." Her smile was a little wistful, yet almost pathetically humorous. "It's the way with folks who try hard—isn't it? They never just seem to get things right. But, say, it doesn't really figure any, does it? You see," she went on, "we both wanted you back. But I needed something more than that. You told me in your—that long, long letter of yours, marriage between us was impossible. Well, say, dear, there's just one thing, and only one thing could make that so. If you don't need me then it's just—impossible. I asked you that, and you didn't tell me in words. But everything else you told me about, you just did want me."

The man made a movement as though to interrupt her, but she would not allow him to speak.

"Don't worry, dear. Guess you got all you need that way coming. I just want you to know I love you through and through, and that surely goes—just as long as I live. Meanwhile," she added, her smile gaining in confidence as her thoughts probed ahead into the distant future, "I'm going right back to home, and mother; right back to that little tumble-down shack you know, dear, and I'm going to get on with my—plowing. And later on, dear, when you just get the notion, and come along, why—I guess you'll find me waiting around for you—and I shan't be fixed up in black—and bugles. Good-bye, dear—for the present."

CHAPTER VIII

THE SHADOW OF WAR

With the passing of summer, and the long, pleasant fall, winter's desperate night closed about the world. Now it was succeeded, at last, by the dawn of spring, bringing with it the delicate, emerald carpet of growing grain, which later would ripen to a brilliant cloth of gold. Nor was the earth's beautiful spring raiment to be quickly discarded for its summer apparel. The keen winds yielded reluctantly to summer zephyrs, and winter's dread overcast retreated slowly before the rosy light of the ripening season.

If winter's clouds of threatening elemental storms were obstinate, so were the hovering clouds of human troubles. But, unlike the clouds of winter, the latter were growing with the advancing season, growing until the horizon hung with the threat of storm, that was ready to break even the horizon at which the ever optimistic farmer gazed.

It had been a troublous fall in the labor world, and an even more disturbed winter. The dark months of the year had proved a very hotbed for the microbe of industrial unrest, and it had propagated a hundredfold.

As spring dawned, from every corner of the world came the same story. Strike, strike; everywhere, and in every calling, the word had gone forward—Strike! It mattered not the reason. It mattered not the worker's condition. If wages were ample, then strike for less work. If the work was insufficient, then strike for a minimum wage. In any case strike, and see the demands included recognition of labor unions, and particularly recognition of the demagogues who led them.

So the storm-clouds of industrial insurrection were fostered. They threatened, and, rapidly, in almost every direction, the flood of storm burst. Every sane, hard-thinking man asked his neighbor the reason. Every far-sighted man, on both sides, shook his head, and pointed the approach of a hideous reckoning. Every fool looked on and laughed, and, shrugging his shoulders, swam with the tide on the side to which he belonged.

And all the time the demagogues screamed from the housetops, and claimed the daily press. These carrion of democracy actually belonged to neither side. They did not toil in the mills, nor did they employ labor. Theirs it was to feed upon the carcass of the worker, and wrest power from the hands of those who possessed it. Whatever happened, they must be winners in the game they played. Nor did it matter one iota to them who might be the sufferers by their juggling.

They possessed one marketable commodity, their powers of stirring strife. Nor were they particular to whom they sold. They belonged to a class of their own, an unscrupulous, ambitious, self-seeking race of intelligent creatures, whose sole aim was publicity and power, which, in the end,

must yield them that position and plenty which they decried in others. It mattered little to them whether they preached syndication or sauce. Their services must be paid for in the way they desired. Vituperating from the summit of an upturned butter tub, or hurling invective from the cushioned benches of a nation's Assembly of Legislature, it made no difference to them. Anything they undertook must be paid for, at their own market price.

These were the microbes of industrial unrest which had multiplied during the dark months of the year on hotbeds that were rich, and fat, and warm. Their paunches were heavy with the goodly supplies of sustenance which they drew from the bodies of those who, in their blind ignorance and stupidity, were powerless to resist their insidious blandishments.

Something of all this may have been in Alexander Hendrie's mind as he sat before the accumulations of work awaiting his attention on his desk in the library at Deep Willows. His hard face was shadowed, even gloomy. It was the face of a man which suggested nothing of the success that was really his. Nothing of the triumph with which the successful organizing of the wheat-growers' trust should have inspired him. All his plans had matured, all his efforts had been crowned with that success which seemed to be the hall-mark of the man. That which he set himself to do, he prided himself, he did with his might. Nor did he relinquish his grip upon it till the work was completed.

But on this particular spring morning, the hall-mark seemed somehow to have become obscured. His eyes were troubled and brooding. His work remained untouched. Even an unlighted cigar remained upon the edge of his desk, a sure sign that he had no taste for the work that lay before him.

This condition of affairs had been going on for some time. It had gradually grown worse. To the onlooker, to eyes that had no real understanding of the man, it might have suggested that the great spirit had reached the breaking point, or that some subtle, undermining disease had set in.

One, at least, of those who stood on intimate terms with this man knew that this was not so. Angus Moraine real-

ized the growing depression in his chief, and, perhaps, feared it. But he knew its cause, or, at least, he knew something of its cause. For some reason, reasons which to the hard Scot seemed all insufficient, Hendrie had changed from the time of his discovery of the mistake he had made in the case of Frank Smith. He had heard from his employer, himself the story of that mistake, but Hendrie had only told him sufficient of it to account for his actions in obtaining the man's release.

Then there was that other, more intimate matter, the news of which had leaped like wildfire throughout the household at Deep Willows. Monica was ailing. It was obvious that she was to become a mother, and it was equally obvious that her health was suffering in an extraordinary manner. There was a doctor, a general practitioner, in residence at Deep Willows. There was also a night nurse in attendance, besides a girl companion, from one of the outlying farms over Gleber way.

These things were known by everybody, not only in the house, but in the neighborhood, and Angus understood that the combination of them all was responsible for the apparently halting movement of the mechanism which so strenuously drove the life of Alexander Hendrie. The man himself was just the same underneath it all, but, for the moment, the clouds were depressing him, and it would require his own great fighting spirit to disperse them.

Angus was in good humor as he entered the library just before noon. He believed he possessed the necessary tonic for his employer's case, and intended to administer it in his own ruthless fashion.

Hendrie glanced across at the door as he heard it open. Then, when he saw who his visitor was, he sighed like a man awakening from an unpleasant dream. He picked up his cigar and lit it, and Angus watched the action with approval. He always preferred to deal with Hendrie when that individual had a cigar thrust at an aggressive angle in the corner of his mouth.

"Well? Anything to report?" Hendrie demanded. The effort of pulling himself together left him alert. The last shadow had, for the moment, passed out of his cold gray eyes.

"Why, yes."

Angus drew up a chair and laid a sheaf of papers beside him. He saw the crowded state of the desk, but gave no sign of the regret which the sight inspired.

"Guess there's a hell of a lot of trouble coming if you persist in this colored labor racket," he said quickly. "I don't mind telling you I hate niggers myself, hate 'em to death. But that's not the trouble. As I've warned you before, ever since that blamed Agricultural Labor Society racket started, the beginning of last year, we've had the country flooded with what I call 'east-side orators.' Talk? Gee! They'd talk hell cold. They've got the ear of every white hobo that prides himself he knows the north end of a plow from the south, and they've filled them full of this black labor racket."

Hendrie was lifted out of himself. The cold light of his eyes flashed into a wintry smile.

"Ah," he said. "Strike talk."

"Sure. And I guess it's going to be big. I'd say there's a big head behind it all—too."

Hendrie nodded.

"They've been gathering funds all the year. Now they guess they're ready—like everybody else—to get their teeth into the cake they want to eat. Go ahead."

Angus took a cigar from the box Hendrie held out, and bit the end off.

"It's well enough for you. You ain't up against all the racket. I am. We've got plenty labor around here without darnation niggers. Why not quit 'em?"

Hendrie shook his head, and the other went on.

"Anyway, yesterday, Sunday, I was around, and I ran into a perfect hallelujah chorus meeting, going on right down, way out on the river bank. Guess they didn't reckon I'd smell 'em out. There were five hundred white men at that meeting, and they were listening to a feller talking from the stump of a tree. It was the nigger racket. That, and strike for more wages, and that sort of truck. He was telling 'em that there was just one time to strike for farm folks. That was harvest. Said it would hurt owners more to see their crops ruined in the ear than to quit seeding. Well, I got good and mad, and I'd got my gun with me.

So I walked right up to that feller, and asked him what in hell he was doing on your land. He'd got five hundred mossbacks with him, and he felt good. Guessed he could bluff me plenty. He got terribly gay for a while, till I got busy. You see, with five hundred around it was up to me to show some nerve. The moment he started I whipped out my gun. I gave him two minutes to get down and light out. He wasted most of them, and I had to give him two that shaved the seat of his pants, one for each minute. Then he hopped it, and the five hundred mossbacks laffed 'emselves sick. However, I told 'em they were disturbing the Sunday nap of the fish in the river, and they, too, scattered. But it don't help, Mr. Hendrie. It means a big piece of trouble coming. Those fellers'll gather round again like flies, and they'll suck in the treacle that flows from the lips of some other flannel mouth. Specially if it's 'black' treacle."

Hendrie's smile had become fixed. And the set of it left his eyes snapping.

"See here, Angus," he cried, with some vehemence. "I dont hold a brief for niggers as niggers. But I hold a brief for them as human creatures."

He swung himself round on his chair and rested his elbow, supporting his head upon his hand, upon the overflowing desk. His cigar assumed a still more aggressive pose in the corner of his mouth.

"The world's just gone crazy on equality. That is, the folk who've got least of its goods. That's all right. I'd feel that way myself—if I hadn't got. Well, here's an outfit of white folk who reckon to make me pay, and pay good. Not me only, but all who own stuff. Well, if they can make me pay—guess I'll just have to pay. But anyway, I've a right to demand the equality they're shouting for. Guess a nigger hasn't a dog's place among white folks. I don't care a darn. But a nigger can do my work, and I can handle him. And if the whole white race of mossbacks don't like it they can go plumb—to—hell. That's the way I feel. That's the way all this strike racket that's going on makes me feel. If they want fight they can get all they need. Maybe they reckon they can break me all up with their brawn and muscle, and by quitting, and refusing to take my pay. I just tell you they can't. Let 'em build up

their giant muscle, and get going good. I'll fight 'em—but I'll fight 'em with the wits that have put me where I am, and—I'll beat 'em."

Angus Moraine's sour face and somber eyes lit. He knew his man, and he liked to hear him talk fight. But he was curious to know something of that which he knew still remained to be told.

"This is the first year of the trust operations," he said shrewdly. "What if the crop is left to rot on the ground? This place, here, is now just a fraction of the whole combine, as I understand it."

Hendrie nodded. Amusement was added to the light of battle in his eyes.

"Sure," he said.

Then he reached across the desk and picked up a large bundle of papers. He passed them over to the other.

"Take 'em," he said easily. "Read 'em over at your leisure. You got property in this trust. Maybe you'll read something there that's cost me a deal of thought. That's the United Owners' Protection Schedule. You'll find in it a tabulated list of every property in the combine. Its area of grain. Its locality. Also a carefully detailed list of *Owner Workers*, their numbers, and supplies of machinery for seeding and *harvesting*. You'll also find a detailed distribution sheet of how these, in case of emergency, can be combined and distributed, and, aided with additional machinery, supplied by the trust, can complete the harvest on all trust lands *without the help of one single hired man.* The machinery is ordered, and is being distributed now—in case the railroad troubles develop about harvest time. There's also another document there of no small importance. It was passed unanimously at the last general meeting of directors, and is inspired by these—darned labor troubles. It empowers me to sell crops *standing* in the ear, at a margin under anticipated market price to speculators—if it's deemed advisable by the directors. This again is for our protection."

Then he held up a bunch of telegrams.

"These are wires from some of the big speculators. They're in code, so you can't read 'em. They're offers to buy—now. These offers, increasing in price each time as

we get nearer the harvest, will come along from now on till the grain is threshed. I can close a deal any moment I choose to put pen to paper. Well?"

"Well?"

Angus looked into the man's fearless eyes, marveling at the wonder of foresight he displayed. For the moment he almost pitied the dull-witted farmhand who contemplated pitting himself against such caliber.

"Say, Angus, boy," Hendrie went on, after a pause. "Sometimes I sort of feel the game isn't worth it, fighting this mush-headed crowd who have to get other folks to think for 'em, and tell 'em when they're not satisfied. It's like shooting up women and children, in spite that any half-dozen could literally eat me alive. I tell you brain's got muscle beat all along the line. Give every man an equal share all over the world, and in six months' time it will be cornered again by brain that isn't equally distributed, and never will be."

"I'm getting another crew of niggers up from the south, and you'll have 'em put on 'time' right here at Deep Willows," he went on, after a pause. "I'm going to run my land in my own way. They need fight? They can get it. I'm in the humor to fight. And if they shout much more I'll get Chinamen down from Vancouver to bear a hand in the work."

Hendrie stood for a moment with his hand on the open door. His eyes were still alight with the fire of battle which Angus's visit had inspired. The reckless spirit of defiance was still stirring, a recklessness which was, perhaps, unusual in him. The strongest characteristic of this man was his invincible resolution. It was his deliberateness of purpose, urged by supreme personal force that had placed him where he was—not recklessness.

But just now an actual desire for recklessness was running riot through his hot veins. He wanted to fight. He felt it was the safety valve necessary for his own desperate feelings.

Monica's condition more than troubled him. All the more so because he knew that his own actions had helped her peculiar ailing, which was rapidly sapping all her vitality

at the time she most needed it. He knew, no one better, that Frank's troubles, his absence, and the uncertainty of his future, had played upon her nervous system till she was left no longer fit to bear her burden of motherhood.

Oh yes, he knew. He knew of the shattered wreck of her woman's heart, and it maddened him to think that the cause of it lay at his door. More than this, the black, haunting shadow of memory left him no peace. It was with him at all times, now jeering and mocking, now threatening him. But his own remorse he felt he could bear. He was a fighter; he could battle with self as with any other foe. But, for Monica, his love drove him to a desperation which sometimes threatened to overwhelm him.

He closed the door behind him, and hurried toward the entrance hall. As he reached it he saw the figure of Phyllis Raysun ascending the stairs. He promptly called to her.

"Tell me," he cried. "Well, child? What is Dr. Fraser's report?"

The girl turned, and almost reluctantly descended the stairs.

Monica's appeal to her to come to her had been irresistible to the heart of the sympathetic girl. The appeal had been conveyed to her by Hendrie himself, the man whom she believed she hated as a monster of cruelty. She had listened to him, and something in the manner in which he had urged her, promising that the work of her farm should go forward during her absence by his own men, and that her mother should lack for no comfort that money could purchase, gave her an insight into a nature that began at once to interest her, in spite of her definitely formed opinions of him. The man certainly puzzled her young, but, for a girl of her upbringing, wide understanding.

Nor had her stay at Deep Willows lessened her interest.

Now she looked at him with unsmiling eyes.

"The doctor's just gone right into Everton for special physic," she said.

"Yes, yes. But—his report?"

Phyllis's gaze wandered to the front door, out of which the doctor had just passed.

"He says—slight improvement," she replied coldly.

"Ah! Improvement! Yes?"

The man sighed. He was clinging to the meager encouragement of that single word.

Phyllis understood. She nodded. Then her eyes lit with a sudden purpose, and she dashed his hope.

"Oh, but say, Mr. Hendrie," she cried. "It doesn't just mean a thing. It doesn't sure—sure. There's just one hope for Mo—for Mrs. Hendrie. It's Frank. You don't understand. How can you understand us women? Get Frank right back to her, and—and you won't need Doc. Fraser for her any more than I want him. That's what you'll need to do. She's pining her life right away for him. She loves him. He's—he's her son. Can't you see? She just worships you right through, because you're her husband. But Frank? Why, she thinks of the days when his little hands used to cling around her, tearing her fixings, that cost money, and all that. She—she just loves every hair of his poor head."

The girl's hands were held out appealingly, and the man's eyes dared not look in their direction. She had poured an exquisite torture into his already troubled heart, and her appealing hands had twisted the knife that probed its depths. She could not add one detail to his knowledge of all it would mean, not only to Monica, but to himself, if only Frank could be brought home to the great house at Deep Willows.

One hand went up to his clammy brow. The square-tipped fingers ran their way through his ample, graying hair. Then, with a sudden nervous movement, his arms flung out.

"Oh, God!" he cried, his eyes suddenly blazing with a passion that had for one brief moment broken the bonds which usually so sternly controlled it. "What do you know, child? What can you know of the awful longing I have to bring that boy here? You say I do not know you women. I tell you you do not know all that men can feel. You think me a brute, a monster; I have seen it in your eyes. You think my every thought is money and self. Maybe you are justified. It is money—gold that has been my undoing. It is that which has wrecked my life. Pshaw! You don't understand. Nobody does—but myself. But I tell you, here and now, I'd give all I have, everything I possess in

life, even life itself, to bring that boy here, and know that he would remain with us for—ever."

His outburst left the girl half frightened. But his passion died out almost as swiftly as it had arisen. His control was not long yielded, and, as his eyes resumed their wonted steadiness, and looked up into Phyllis's with something almost like a smile, she timidly sought to help him.

"I'm—I'm sorry," she said, on the impulse. Then she leaned forward eagerly. "But—but can't it—be done? Oh, if he would only come—in time. I know he will come—some day. If I did not—then—then I shouldn't want to go right on living."

The man started slightly.

"I—I had forgotten—you," he said.

Phyllis nodded.

"Frank is in—Calford," she said slowly. "I had mail from him yesterday."

She was speaking in the hope that what she said might help to stir him to some definite action. She was beginning to understand the powers which he possessed.

The man appeared to be lost in thought.

"I am going to marry Frank—one day," she went on, in her confident little way.

Suddenly Hendrie looked round at her. His eyes surveyed her closely. He became aware for the first time of the strength of her pretty face. The bright intelligence looking out of her deep eyes. The firmness of her mouth and chin. These things left a marked effect upon him. His manner became almost gentle.

"What is he doing in Calford?" he asked abruptly.

A faint smile lit the girl's eyes for a moment, and then passed.

"He's—guess you'd call it 'agitating.' He doesn't. I'd say he calls it preaching brotherhood and equality to a gang of railroaders."

Again the man started.

"He's—working on the—railroad trouble?" he demanded incredulously.

Phyllis nodded. Hendrie drew a deep breath.

"Yes. He's been working hard for a year now, and—and

I believe he's just thrown himself into the cause of—Socialism with all his might. He—he gets talking everywhere. His name's always in the papers. Say, can't you do a thing? Can't you help—bring him here?"

Hendrie looked into the girl's earnest face. Then he looked away. A dozen conflicting emotions were stirring within him.

"I can't say right now, child," he replied, after a pause. Then he looked up, and Phyllis read a definite resolve in his hard gray eyes. "You best write him," he went on. "Write him to-day. Tell him how Monica is. Tell him all you like, but leave me out. Maybe I *can* do something. Guess there's going to be a big fight with labor, and we're going to be in it. Maybe the thought of it makes me feel good. It's about the only thing can make me feel good—now. But I wish—your Frank was on our side," he went on, almost to himself. "I'd say he'd be a good fighter. Yes, I'd say he was that. Must be. It's good to fight, too, when troubles get around. It's good—sure."

"Must men always—fight?" asked Phyllis quietly.

The man stared.

"Why, yes!" he said in astonishment.

"Frank doesn't think so."

The millionaire shook his head deliberately.

"Say," he cried confidently, "your Frank will fight when the time comes. And—he'll fight—big."

"What makes you say—that?"

The girl's question came sharply, and, in a moment, a great light leaped into Alexander Hendrie's eyes.

"What makes me say—that?" he cried. Then he shrugged, and moved to pass her on the stairs on the way to his wife's room. "I know," he said, confidently. "That's all."

CHAPTER IX

CAPITAL AND LABOR

It was a large hall on the outskirts of Calford, in one of the poorer neighborhoods. It was packed almost to suffocation by an audience of stern-faced, eager humanity. There

were the ample figures of uniformed train conductors; there were the thin, hard-muscled freighters. There were men from the locomotive departments, with traces of coal-dust about their eyes, of which, even in their leisure, they never seem quite able to rid themselves.

There were colored Pullman servants, and waiters, and cooks from the dining-cars. There were plate-layers in their blue overalls, and machinists from the round-house. So, too, was the depot department represented. It was a great gathering of all grades of railroad workers on the Calford section of the system.

The benches were crowded right up to the narrow platform, upon which a group of four men, evidently workers like the audience, were seated behind a tall youth, with thick, fair hair and enormous breadth of shoulder. He was standing out alone. He was talking rapidly in a deep, resonant voice which carried distinctly to the remotest corners of the building. His face was flushed, and his blue eyes were alight with earnestness for the subject of his address.

Point after point he was striving to drive home by the sheer force of his own convictions. There was no display about him. There was none of the pathetic humor, or the unconsciously humorous pathos of the ordinary demagogue. He was preaching the gospel of equality, as he saw it, judiciously tempered to meet with the requirements of the society to which his audience belonged, and which he, for the moment, represented.

He talked well. Extremely well. And his audience listened. Frequently his sentences were punctuated by approving "hear, hears," in many directions. But there was none of that explosive approval which is as nectar to the ordinary demagogue.

To one man, sitting in the back of the hall, a man nearly as large as the speaker, though older, enveloped in a rough suit, which, while matching the tone of the rest of the audience, sat ill upon him, it seemed that the speaker lacked something with which to carry his audience.

He listened attentively, he followed every word, seeking to discover the nature of this lack. It was not easy to detect. Yet he was sure of its existence. Nor was it till the

evening was half spent that he quietly registered the fact that this man missed one great essential to win his way to the hearts of these people. *He was not one of them.* He only understood their lives through immature observation. He had never lived their life.

Somehow the conviction left him satisfied, and he settled himself more comfortably upon his uncomfortable bench.

Later on he became aware of a sense of restlessness running through the hall. There was a definite clearing of throats among the audience. There was a good deal of shifting of positions. He even observed the inclination of heads toward each other, which told him that whispered conversations were going on about him. To him this meant a waning interest in the speaker. Doubt was no longer in his mind, but now his satisfaction became touched with regret.

Now he knew this man was not brutal enough. He was not coarse enough. He did not know the hearts of these men sufficiently. His mind was far too ideal, and his talk further lacked in its appeal to self.

To hold these men he must come down to definite promises of obtaining for them, and bestowing upon them, the fulfilment of desires they were incapable of satisfying for themselves. It was the old story of satisfied men made dissatisfied, and now they required the promise of satisfaction for appetites suddenly rendered sharp-set.

The man in the rough clothes, which sat so ill upon him, knew that these men would leave that hall feeling they had wasted a leisure that might have been given up to their own particular pastimes.

The meeting lasted over two hours, but the man at the back of the hall left long before its close. He had heard all he wanted to hear, and felt it was sufficient for his purpose.

He drove back to his hotel in a handsome automobile, in which his clothes looked still more out of place. This was quickly remedied, however, and, when once more he emerged from the building, he was clad as befitted the sixty-horsepower vehicle which he re-entered.

Frank had returned to his room at the Algonquin Hotel. He was tired, and a shadow of dissatisfaction clouded his

blue eyes as he scanned the bundle of manuscript lying in his lap.

He was going over his speech, the speech he had made that night to the railroad men of Calford. He knew he had not "made good," and was seeking the weak spots in the written manuscript. But he could not detect them.

It never occurred to him that his weakness lay in the fact of that manuscript. He had written his speech because he felt it was an important occasion. Austin Leyburn had impressed its importance upon him. He had written it and learned it by heart, and the result had been—failure. Of the latter he was convinced, in spite of assurances to the contrary by his comrades on the platform. For the rest the significance of his failure had passed him by.

Yes, it was no use shirking the point. He had failed. He threw the manuscript upon his dressing bureau, and abandoned himself to the unpleasant reflections the knowledge brought.

It was nearly midnight when a bell-boy knocked at his door. A man, he said, was waiting below, and wished to see him. He handed him a card.

Frank took it and glanced at it indifferently. Then his indifference passed, and his eyes lit with a peculiar expression. The boy waited.

"Alexander Hendrie," he read.

"Wants to see you—important," the boy urged, as the man remained silently contemplating the strip of pasteboard.

"Important." The word repeated itself in Frank's brain again and again. He still stared at the card. What did Alexander Hendrie want? What could he want? By what right did he dare to intrude upon him?

He was on the point of sending down a deliberate refusal to see him. He was hot with resentment, a resentment he had endeavored long ago to stifle, and had almost succeeded. But he had miscalculated the human nature in him. Now it rose up and scattered the result of his careful schooling.

"Shall I show him up?" demanded the boy impatiently.

It was on the tip of Frank's tongue to pronounce his refusal, when, quite suddenly, he changed his mind. No, he would see him. It would be good to see him. He could at

least show him he was not afraid of him. He could let him see how he despised all that which this man counted worth while. Yes, he would see him.

"Show him up," he said coldly. The boy hurried away, pocketing, with the avidity of his kind, the trifling silver coin he was presented with.

Frank rose from his chair and began to move about the room in the restless fashion of a man disturbed more than he admits, more than, perhaps, he knows. All thought of his evening's failure had passed from his mind. He was about to confront the man who had dishonestly sent him to a convict's cell, and a deadly bitterness surged through his veins.

The door opened without any warning. Frank's back was turned. His bed stood between him and his visitor when he swung round and looked into the millionaire's face.

"Well?" he demanded, with a deliberate harshness.

Every feeling of bitter antagonism was expressed in his greeting.

The millionaire closed the door behind him. His face expressed no feeling whatsoever. He had schooled himself well, and his schooling possessed the ripeness of experience. He heard the younger man's tone, and every feeling it expressed was conveyed to his understanding. He made no attempt at politeness or amiability. He accepted the position as the other chose to make it, but without any display of resentment.

"I drove from Deep Willows to hear you speak to-night. Also, I wanted to speak to you." Hendrie glanced about him at the pleasantly furnished bedroom. "May I—sit?"

For a moment Frank remained silent. He looked hard at this strong, ruthless man with his slightly graying hair and clean-cut, resolute features. Nor did his powerful figure, in its faultless evening dress, escape his attention.

Suddenly he kicked the rocker he had previously been occupying toward his visitor. His action was the extreme of discourtesy and contempt.

"You are uninvited, but—it's a free enough country," he said, with almost childish rudeness.

Hendrie passed his manner by.

"Yes, I s'pose it's a free enough country," he said, accepting the chair deliberately.

Frank watched him, and slowly his self-schooling began to reassert itself. This man had come with a definite purpose. Somehow, he felt that, had he been in his place, it would have required some nerve, even courage, for him to have faced any man he had dishonestly condemned to penitentiary for five years. Nature again was strong in him. He admired courage—even in one whom he knew to be an enemy.

"Free enough for the rich," he said, with a sarcasm that hardly fitted him. "Honest people don't always find it free."

The millionaire eyed him leisurely. Somehow his gray eyes were softer than usual. This man seemed powerless to move him to antagonism, even to passive resentment.

"Would you mind if—I lighted a cigar?" he inquired. "I s'pose it's useless to offer you one. You don't care to receive anything at my hands."

Frank seated himself upon the edge of the bed.

"Smoke all you want," he said ungraciously. "No, I want nothing at your hands—except to be let alone."

Hendrie deliberately lit his cigar. For once it did not find its way to the corner of his hard mouth. He blew a thin stream of smoke from his pursed lips, and the action ended in the faintest possible sigh.

"I'm sorry," he said. Then he leveled his eyes directly into the other's. "I made you an offer months ago. You refused it then. I s'pose you still feel the same? It still stands."

Frank sat up, and his eyes lit.

"It can go on standing," he cried fiercely. "I tell you I want nothing from you. I suppose it is only the arrogance of your wealth makes you dare to offer me—me such compensation." He finished up with a laugh that had nothing pleasant in it.

"Dare?" Hendrie's bushy brows were raised mildly.

"Yes, dare!" There was something very like violence in the younger man's tone.

"I thought every man who does a wrong—unwittingly—has a right to make—reparation, not compensation."

"Unwittingly? Do you call it 'unwitting' when you use your wealth to bribe and corrupt so that a man, even if he be guilty, may be made to suffer? These were the things you did to ruin me—an innocent man."

Hendrie smoked on. His eyes were lowered so that the other could not see their expression.

"I did these things, and—there is no excuse," he said presently. "You are young. Anyway, you cannot see with my eyes. Let me try to fit the case on you. Suppose you married—your Phyllis. Suppose you had every reason for believing her faithless to you. Suppose you caught her lover, as you believed, with money, your money, with which she had supplied him. To what lengths would you go to punish him?"

"It would be impossible. As impossible as it was in your wife's case."

"Just so. But—suppose. Suppose—you believed."

Hendrie was leaning forward in his rocker."

"I might shoot him, but I would not——"

"Just so—you would commit murder, where I—I resorted to methods perhaps less criminal. Suppose I had shot you. Suppose I had escaped the legal consequences of my crime, and then discovered your innocence. Need I go further?"

The subtle manner in which he had been inveigled into debate infuriated Frank. But somehow he was powerless to withdraw. The man's calmness held him, and he blundered further.

"If you possessed half the honesty you claim for your purpose you would have been man enough to go to your wife for explanation."

Again Hendrie's eyes were averted, but the extraordinary mildness of his manner forced itself further on the younger man.

"And yet you would have shot the man you found in what you believed similar relations to your—Phyllis? Do you know why you would have done that—even worse than I did—in the eyes of the law? I will tell you. It is because—you love Phyllis. Because you really love Phyllis you would do as your heart dictates—not as your head prompts you. Did you not truly, humanly love, you would go to her for explanation, because then you would not fear

to hear the hideous truth from her, that she no longer loved you. In some things, my boy, where our love is concerned, we do not possess all our courage. I was older, I knew more of life, therefore I did not shoot, as I could easily have done. But my passion for my wife is as strong as is your young love for Phyllis, and I was too cowardly to risk hearing the truth that her love for an elderly man was dead, and all her affection was given to a younger man. Try and picture my fears if you can. I, with my hair graying, and you, with the flowing hair of superb youth."

Frank had no answer. He was trying to remember only his injuries at this man's hands.

"It is because of these things I have dared to offer to make reparation to you, have dared to come and see you," Hendrie went on. Then his eyes smiled into the other's half angry, half troubled face. To any one knowing the man, his smile was a miraculous change from the front with which he usually faced the world. "You will accept nothing from my hands, you say. So be it. But—and make no mistake—reparation, all of it that lies in my power, shall be made. That you cannot prevent. Remember you are launched upon a life of great vicissitudes. You cannot foresee its ramifications, you cannot see its possibilities. Wherever you are I shall be looking on, and, though you may not know it, all my influence will be at work—on your behalf. I was around to-night, dressed in clothing no doubt you would like to see me dressed in always, listening to your particularly clever, but unconvincing speech to the railroad men. You would have done really well among men of a higher intelligence, men who think and feel as you do, but you failed to raise one single hope among those you were addressing, that they would get 'something for nothing' if they followed your leadership. Consequently you failed."

Frank's face suddenly flushed, and a fierce retort leaped to his lips.

"Something for nothing!" he cried scathingly. "That is your understanding of the laborer who is sweated by big corporations seeking outrageous dividends. Something for nothing!" he went on, lashing himself to a white fury. "It is always the sneer of the employer, of the vampire who lives by others' toil and enjoys luxury, while those who help

them to it may starve for all they care. I tell you all these poor people can squeeze from the grasp of capital is only a tithe of their just due. Every man is entitled to a fair share of the profits of his toil. He is entitled to live a life of comfort and happiness in proportion to the service he gives in the world's work.

Frank's eyes were flashing and his breath came quickly, but he stared blankly as the other nodded approval of his claims.

"Perfectly right," Hendrie said. "Perfectly just." He leaned back in his rocker and swung himself to and fro. His cigar was poised in one hand, and his eyes were seriously reflective. "Does he not get that?" he asked, after a pause.

"No, a thousand times no!" Frank's denial came with all the force of his passionate conviction.

"You talk of service in the world's work," Hendrie went on reflectively, apparently untouched by the other's heat. "You suggest that it means a man's willingness to exercise his muscles, and whatever intelligence he may possess in the general work which is required by civilization at the moment, and, which, incidentally, is to provide him with a means of living. All labor and those who would protect labor forget, or they seem to me to forget, the fundamental principle of all civilization. They seem to forget that to which civilization owes its very existence—and to whom. Civilization owes its existence to the few—not the many. Civilization owes its progress to the thinkers, not the mere toilers. Battles are won by organization which is the work of the thinker, not the mad, uncontrolled rush of a rabble army. The mill owner is the thinker who must find a market for the wares produced in his mills, or there is no work for the laborer. He must found that mill, or it does not exist. He must spend a life of anxious thought, and ceaseless effort, exhausting his nervous forces till he often becomes a mental wreck, which no mere privations could reduce him to, and such as the mere toiler could never have to endure. The thinker will harness Nature's forces in a manner which will ultimately provide work for millions. But until he harnesses that power, that work is not possible. And so it would be quite easy to go on indefinitely illustrat-

ing the fact that labor owes its well-being, almost its existence, to the thinker. And you would deny the right of the thinker to reap the reward of his efforts."

"I deny the right to profits extorted at the expense of labor. I deny the right to a luxury which others, less endowed by Nature in their attainments, can enjoy. We are all human beings, made alike, with powers of enjoyment alike, with a life that is one and the same, and I deny the right for one to be privileged over another in the creature comforts, which, after all, is one of the main objects of all effort in life. I deny the right to a power in the individual which can be dishonestly used to the detriment of his fellows."

Again the younger man's feelings had risen to fever heat. Again his feelings ran riot in his denial.

Alexander Hendrie looked on unmoved.

"My boy," he said gently, "if you would deny all these things, then appeal to your Creator to make all men of equal capacity in thought, morals, and muscle. You cannot force equality upon a world where the Divine Creator has seen fit to make all things unequal. I tell you you cannot change the principles of life. Let the sledge hammer of Socialism be turned loose, let it crush the oppressors of labor as it will. But life will remain the same. It will go on as before. The thinkers will live in the luxury you deplore, and the toiler will sweat, and ache, and sometimes live in misery, as he does now. But, remember, his misery is no greater than the misery among those clad in the purple. There is no greater misery in the world than the misery of the man or woman who can afford to be happy. All that can be done is to better the lot of the worker within given limits. But, for God's sake, make the limit such as to leave him with incentive sufficient to lift him from the ranks in which he is enlisted, should his capacity prove adequate for promotion.

The force of the millionaire's simple views left a marked effect upon the other. There was something so definite, yet so tolerant about them. Somehow Frank felt that this man was not thinking with the brain of the rich man. He was speaking from a wide and strenuous experience of life. It almost seemed to him that Alexander Hendrie must have gone through a good deal of that which he, Frank, be-

lieved to be the sufferings of the unjustly treated workers.

"You admit that the condition of labor needs improvement?" he demanded sharply.

"No one more readily," Hendrie replied earnestly. "Help them, give them every benefit possible. But the man who would tell them that they earn, and have a right to more than the market value of their daily toil is a liar! He is committing a crime against both society and labor itself."

"Do you so treat—your labor?"

"I pay him his market price. Privately I am at all times ready to help him. But my best sympathies are not with the poor creature who has no thought beyond his food, his sleep, and the fathering of numerous offspring which, without regard to responsibility, he sheds upon the world in worse case than himself. It is the man who will strive to rise above his lot that has my sympathy. The man who has the courage to face disaster, and even starvation, that, in however small a degree, he may leave his mark upon the face of the world. That is the man who appeals to me, and whom I am even now seeking to help."

Frank rose from his seat upon his bed.

"You are helping—now?" he demanded incredulously.

The millionaire smiled.

"Maybe you would not call it by that name." He shook his head, and rose heavily from his chair. "Let that pass," he said, with a quick, keen glance into the boy's face. "I must get back to Deep Willows. I had no right to spend all this time away. Mrs. Hendrie is ill—seriously ill, I fear. Your Phyllis is with her, serving her for friendship's sake. She does not receive even a market value for her toil. The price of her service is inestimable."

"Mon—Mrs. Hendrie is—ill?"

Frank's face blanched. A great trouble crept into his eyes. Hendrie noted the expression closely.

"Yes," he said simply. "She is to become a—mother. But she is ill—and—ah, well, maybe she'll pull through. It is in the hands of Providence." He sighed with genuine trouble.

"You say—Phyllis—is with her?"

"Why, yes. She has been with us for months."

"Has Mon—Mrs. Hendrie been ill—so long?"

Frank's voice was almost pleading.

"She began to ail when she—returned from Toronto—nearly a year ago."

"A year—ago?"

"Yes."

The keen eyes of the millionaire were strangely soft as he watched the evident suffering in the boy's young face. He waited.

"I——" Frank hesitated. Then, with a sudden impulsive rush, he blurted out a request. "Can I—that is, might I be allowed to call and see—her?" he asked, his voice hoarse with sudden emotion. He had forgotten he desired nothing at this man's hands.

"Why, yes. The doors of Deep Willows are always open to you."

Frank looked up. For a moment something very like panic swept over him. His visitor's eyes were upon him, watching him with nothing but kindness in their depths. Each was thinking of the same thing. Each knew that a battle had been fought out between them, and victory had been won. Frank's panic lay in the knowledge that he had been the loser. Then his panic passed, and only resentment and his anxiety for Monica remained. But the miracle of it was that his resentment was far less than he could have believed possible.

Hendrie picked up his hat.

"I'm glad I came," he said, moving toward the door.

Frank averted his eyes.

"Good night," he said brusquely, vainly striving to bolster his angry feelings.

"Good night, my boy."

Hendrie passed out of the room and closed the door behind him carefully.

As he went Frank flung himself into a chair, and, for a while, sat with his face buried in his hands. Monica was ill. Seriously ill. Maybe dangerously ill. Phyllis had said no word of it in her letters. Not one word, and she was with her. No word had reached him.

He caught his breath. He had suddenly realized how utterly he had cut himself out of Monica's life, the life of this woman who had been as a mother to him.

CHAPTER X

STRIKE TROUBLES SPREADING

It was a sultry afternoon, one of those clammy days when flies stick and become victims of the drink habit, striving to quench unnatural thirst at patches of spilled liquor on bar-room counters, and, in a final frenzy, endeavor to commit suicide in the dregs of warm tumblers left by their human fellow-sufferers.

Lionel K. Sharpe, the proprietor of the Russell Hotel at Everton, was propped behind his counter, smiling with amiable idiocy at the vagaries of two drunken flies scrambling about the inner sides of a tumbler, which contained the dregs of what was alleged to be port wine. Abe Hopkinson, and Josh Taylor, the bullet-headed butcher, watched them from the other side of the bar.

"Guess I'd say it's hereditary in flies," said Abe, feeling scientific.

"Wot's hered—hereditry?" demanded the butcher.

"Why—drink," explained Abe.

"Seems it's here—her—hereditry in most folk," smiled Lionel K., chewing the stump of his cigar vigorously to conceal his difficulty with such scientific terms.

The butcher nodded.

"I'd say some thirsts couldn't be brought on any other way," he said. "Well, not to say—easy."

Abe grinned.

"Guess you ain't a believer in that guy Darwin's highbrow theory?"

"Don't know what it is," replied the butcher, lifting the glass, and tilting it so as to put the ruddy liquid within reach of the volubly buzzing insects. "Anyway, I don't believe in it. Say—I'll swar' them two sossled microbes is holding a concert to 'emselves. See, one of 'em's doing the buzzin', and blamed if the other feller ain't just wavin' a leg to beat the band, keepin' time. Say, ain't they havin' a hell of a time?"

Lionel K. Sharpe struck a match, tried to light his cigar stump, burned his mustache, and abandoned the attempt.

"Hell!" he cried in disgust. Then he pointed at the flies. "Say, Josh, jest think of it. Guess that splash of port's well-nigh a sea—leastways a lake to them. How'd you fancy standin' around a sea of port wine?"

"Guess I'd rather be settin' in a boat and paddlin' around in it—jest as long as it wasn't your port. On second thought, I'd rather be in a sailin' craft. You see, I'd have more hands free." He pointed at the flies. "Say, that feller's quit buzzin'. I've a notion he's sung hisself hoarse. Mebbe he's got the hiccups. Wal, say, get that! They're kissin' each other."

"They're sloshed to the gills, sure," grinned Sharpe.

"Ain't it queer?" said Abe. "Blamed if it ain't jest the same with folks. They git a drink under their belts, an' it sets 'em foolish. They get blowin' their horns, an' doing things. Then they start singing, an' finish up shootin'—or kissin' each other."

Josh desisted from his efforts at plying the flies with more drink, and stared round at his companion.

"I'd jest like to know how drink takes you, Abe," he cried in pretended alarm, "fightin' or kissin'." 'Cause if it's the amorous racket, I quit you right here. I just ain't kissin' a thing. I quit it years ago. It's a fool trick, anyway, an' physic dopers all sez it's full to death of disease." Then he added speculatively: "Makes you sort o' wonder what kind o' disease your kisses 'ud hand around. You don't look as if you'd got a spavin, or a spring halt. What 'ud you guess, Lionel?"

"Guess?" Mr. Sharpe helped himself to a fresh cigar. "Ther' ain't no guessin' to it. Jest consumption. That's all."

He blew a cloud of smoke on the drunken flies, and sent them tumbling headlong into the liquor. Then he picked up the glass and washed it.

"Ah, yes," said Josh. "That's it—consumption—generly of liquor."

"Which you ain't never bustin' to pay fer," cried Abe, with a laugh.

"Pay? Wal, I'd smile. Pay? Guess I gone right on strike payin'. My union don't let its members pay oftener than they're obliged. But we don't stop non-unions payin'.

Oh, no. We jest boost 'em right on an' help 'em pay."

"Strike?" said Abe. "Guess it's a kind o' fashion goin' around strikin'. Everybody's worrying to quit somethin'—an' it's most generly work. But that ain't no use to you, Josh. You got to do work 'fore you ken quit it."

The bullet-headed butcher smiled benignly.

"Work? Say, you ain't heard o' work. Guess you're one o' them all-fired capitalists, wot sets around makin' profit out o' us pore fellers who kill the meat what fills the tins you poison your customers with, by reason you've bought up a job line o' throw outs. Work?" he went on, throwing out his arms in ridiculous burlesque of a strike orator. "We are the fellers who do the work. We make your profit for you. We—we—we are the people wot sets the old world wobblin' around every day. We—us down-trods who have to drink Sharpe's rot-gut whisky while you amuse yourself settin' flies drunk on port wine!"

At that moment the swing door was thrust open, and Pete Farline, the drug-store keeper, and Sid Ellerton pushed their way in.

"Drink, Lionel," demanded Peter wearily.

But the hotel proprietor shook his head and winked at Josh.

"I gone on strike—sure," he said.

Pete looked around at Josh and Abe for enlightenment.

"Strike?" he inquired. "Guess I don't get you."

"Why every feller's strikin' now," grinned Josh.

"Oh."

"Quit servin' drinks?" asked Sid, supporting himself on the bar.

Lionel K. Sharpe shook his head and laughed.

"Nope," he said, amid a cloud of smoke. "Just quit chalkin' up Pete's score."

He obtained the laugh he required, and set glasses before the newcomers.

"Seein' it's that way, Lal, I'll have to go on strike sousin' your poison," Farline retorted. Then he turned to the others. "Say, fellers, let's strike for decent liquor, an' when we get it let's strike for havin' it free. If we get that, we'll have pipes laid on over our beds, and strike again if we don't get 'em."

"Why, yes," laughed Josh. "Then we'll strike cos the rats we see ain't spiders."

"Sure," nodded Abe. "An' strike like hell if they grow wings."

Lionel K. Sharpe held out his hand for Pete's money.

"Then when you wake up—you'll strike anyway," he said.

Pete handed him a dollar bill, and Josh's face purpled with laughter.

"Get it, boys," he cried. "Look at that!" he went on, pointing at Sharpe. "There he is, fellers. Ther's the capitalist. Money for nothin'. That's what it is. That's the feller we're on to. Down with Capital, sez I! Up with Labor, or any other old thing. Say, we're right on strike, an' I'm goin' out to get a banner, an' form a parade. I'm jest goin' to make speeches to the populace 'bout things. I'm full up o' Capital. We're sweated, that's wot we are. We won't stand for it, neither. Down with 'em. We want their blood. We want the world—with a fence round it. Say, fellers, ef I git busy that way will you ante up an automobile, an' drink, an' boost me into the government so I ken rob folks right, an' keep out of the penitentiary?"

"Boost you to hell!" cried Sharpe, as the swing doors were pushed open, and a stranger made his way in.

All eyes were turned upon the newcomer. He was a powerfully built man of medium size. The gray in his dark hair showed beneath his soft felt hat, and his eyes were narrow and keen. His dress was the ordinary dress of the city man, and quite unpretentious.

The men in the bar eyed him covertly as he made his way to the counter and called for a "long lager."

Lionel K. Sharpe served him as though strangers were an everyday occurrence in that bar, but he was speculating as to who he might be.

"Hot," said the man, after a long pull at his schooner of beer.

"Some," observed Sharpe, handing him his change.

"Bad road from Calford," the stranger said, after another journey into his beer.

"Hellish," returned Sharpe, wiping glasses.

"How far to Deep Willows?" asked the other, presently.

"Nigh seven," replied Sharpe.

"Across the river?"

"You don't need to. Keep to the right bank."

"Good. Thanks."

The stranger finished his drink, and made his way out of the place.

In a moment the "strikers" were crowding at the window watching his departure. They saw him walk across the road to a large automobile waiting for him. They saw him speak to the driver, and then jump into the seat beside him. Then the machine, with a heavy snort, rolled away.

"Another all-fired capitalist," laughed Josh.

"Friend of Hendrie's," murmured Abe.

"Didn't seem Hendrie's class," protested Pete.

Lionel K. Sharpe shook his head.

"I seen him before," he said reflectively. "Seems to me I see him at Calford some time back. Yes. That's it. He—say, gee!" He broke into a loud guffaw, and turned to Josh. "Say, he's the man for you. I mind hearing him shouting down with capitalists to a lot of bum railroaders. That's when I saw him."

"You're on your back, man. You got a nightmare," cried Josh scornfully. "Him drivin' about in an automobile."

Abe grinned.

"That's what they're out for," he cried contemptuously. Then he turned back to the bar. "Guess we'll have another drink—anyway."

Alexander Hendrie was leaving Angus Moraine's office, where he had spent the early hours of the afternoon discussing matters of business and receiving reports. The two men had also spent some time considering the conditions prevailing on the railroad, conditions threatening to affect them considerably. That a big strike was imminent was sufficiently apparent to them both, and each understood the disastrous possibilities to the harvest if it should occur at that time.

There had been strikes before, but, from Hendrie's confidential sources, it had been learned that the forthcoming strike would be of a particularly comprehensive nature. There was big talk of sympathetic strikes on the part of all transport workers, and among those who were required to

handle goods ultimately intended for transport on the railroad.

The Scot was troubled. But Hendrie seemed to revel in the contemplation of a great struggle with Labor. Truth to tell, he was actually pleased that all his energies would be involved in the forthcoming fight. He would have less time to think, and he had no desire to think just now.

He left the office by the outer door, and walked leisurely round to the front of the house, intent upon the threatened struggle, and those things which would be affected by it. He was calmly considering every point, every detail in the great game in which his life was spent, which might be brought into contact with it.

At the entrance porch of the house he paused, and drew a bundle of cipher messages from his pocket. He read them carefully. Each one represented a financial transaction with some well-known Chicago wheat speculator, the completion of which would place his interests beyond the reach of disaster through any strikes. He had only to wire an affirmative to any one of them to set all doubts at rest.

However, he finally returned them to his pocket and shook his head. No, it was too easy. It would rob him of all place in the fight to come—if such fight really were coming. Besides, there would be that loss of profit for the speculator's risk; a loss which his keen, financial mind begrudged. No, not yet. There was time enough. He would only yield to the temptation of safeguarding the affairs of the Trust when it became absolutely necessary.

He thrust his hands deeply into his coat pockets, as though to emphasize his decision, and his gaze wandered toward the fair woodland picture of the river banks, crowded with virgin growth. Acres and acres of ripening grain lay beyond, and here and there, through breaks in the foliage, he could discern the tint of yellow amid the paling carpet of green. The sight of it further hardened his decision.

To a man of lesser caliber the responsibility of that wheat world must have been a burden to tax the nerves to the uttermost. But to Hendrie it was scarcely a labor. He loved this world he had made his, and it weighed far less upon him than did the more trifling worries adding friction to the routine of daily life. But for Monica's illness, and a curious sort of

nightmare haunting the back cells of this man's memory, Alexander Hendrie must have been a perfectly happy man, reveling in a success which had been his life-long ambition.

Finally he turned from the pleasant scenes his thoughts were conjuring. He was about to pass into the house to visit the woman who was the choicest jewel in his crown of success. He moved toward the doorway, but paused abruptly. The sweep of the private trail on the north bank of the river had come within his view, and he beheld a powerful automobile rapidly approaching the house.

For the moment he believed it to be the visit of one of his associates in business, perhaps from Calford, or even Winnipeg. Then he doubted. He was expecting no one. Anyway he would have been notified of their coming.

He left the porch and stood out in the open, watching the vehicle curiously. It came swiftly on, its soft purr humming upon the still, hot air. It was a large touring car, and two people were occupying the front seat. The rest was empty.

A few moments later it drew up sharply abreast of him. A pair of keen eyes were staring at him from the other side of the chauffeur. Hendrie caught their stare, and a quick, deep breath filled his lungs.

For a while, it seemed quite a long time to the millionaire, no word was spoken. Then he saw the man on the other side of the driver jump out of the car. Then he heard him speak.

"You can go back up the trail," he said to his man. "I'll walk out and meet you when I want you."

Then the car moved off. It turned about, and finally rolled away. Hendrie saw all this without taking any interest. For some reason his thoughts had been abruptly carried back into a dim past, to a vision of a land of lofty, barren hills, a land of drear woods and shadowed valleys, a land where fierce cold ate into the bones, and strangled the joy of living.

And all the while his eyes were fixed upon the back of the powerful figure that remained turned toward him until the car had passed out of sight. Then the stranger swung about. His narrow eyes were alight with a passion that seemed unaccountable. He raised one hand, and his forefinger pointed a deadly hatred.

"You! Leo!" he cried.

The dreary scenes of the Yukon heights faded abruptly from the millionaire's mind. He looked into that narrow, evilly expressive face with a cold, hard stare.

"Yes," he said. "Well?"

There was no flinching. There was no surprise even. He spoke utterly without emotion, like the echo of those ruthless hills which only a moment before he had contemplated.

"So—I've come up with you at last!" cried Austin Leyburn. "Oh, I knew I should do so some day. It was not possible for it to be otherwise. I've searched. I've sounded every corner of this continent. Some day, I guessed I'd turn the stone under which you were hiding."

For an instant Hendrie's eyes lit. Then they smiled with a contempt for the mind that could suggest his hiding.

"Guess that's my name—has always been my name." said, with an expressive lifting of the shoulders. "Your search sounds better than it could have been in fact. I allow the world has known just where to set its finger on Alexander Hendrie for many years now. Say, p'raps you're not interested in wheat, and so missed finding me."

"You? Alexander Hendrie?" Leyburn cried incredulously.

"Guess that's my name—has always been my name." Hendrie smoothed his mane of hair with one steady hand. "Folks used to call me Leo, because—of this. By the way, you apparently came to see me?"

The face of Austin Leyburn expressed a devilish hatred no words could have told. It was a hatred nursed and fostered through long years when his mind and energies were wholly turned upon profit extracted through the ignorance and passion of fellow-creatures of inferior mentality. It was an atmosphere in which such passionate bitterness might well be fostered.

But the calmness of his intended victim, for the moment, had a restraining effect. He felt the need for coolness.

So he laughed. There was no mirth in his laughter. It was a hollow sound that jarred terribly.

"Yes, I came here to find Alexander Hendrie, and not—Leo. I came to find the millionaire wheat grower, and challenge him with the injustices he is handing out to white agricultural labor, whose representative I am. I came to warn him that it was impossible for men of our union to work side

by side with black labor, which earns white man's pay. I came to tell him that if he persisted, there is not a white man in the country will work for him, and that he must dismiss all black labor at once. I came to tell Alexander Hendrie these things, and I find—Leo."

Hendrie smiled into his face.

"You came to tell him all this, and you found, in his stead —Leo, the feller I guess you're not particularly well disposed toward. In fact, whom you—rather dislike. Well?"

Years of self-discipline had given Austin Leyburn a fine control of himself. But before that control had been acquired he had been robbed of all he possessed in the world by a man named Leo. He had been made to suffer by this man as few men are made to suffer, and after facing trials and hardships few men face successfully. These sufferings had ingrained into his heart a passionate hatred and desire for revenge no acquired control could withstand, and now the torrent of his bitter animosity broke out.

"Whom I hate better than any man on earth," Leyburn cried, in a low, passionate tone. "Listen to me, Leo. You're a great man now. You're among the rich of this continent, and so you're the more worth crushing. We both find ourselves in different positions now. Very different positions. You are powerful in the control of huge capital, founded upon the gold you stole from me twenty years ago on the Yukon trail. I—I control hundreds of thousands of workers in this country. That is no mean power. Hitherto my power has been exercised in the legitimate process of protecting that labor from men of your class. But from this moment all that is changed. Before all things in my life I have a mission to fulfill. It is my personal vengeance upon the man who robbed me twenty years ago, and left his mistress, bearing her unborn child, to starve on the long winter trail."

"It is a lie! She was not left to starve. She was provided for."

Hendrie was driven to furious denial by the taunt.

"Ah, that's better!" cried Leyburn. "Much better. I've cut through your rough hide. I say you left her to starve—for all you cared. And I've set myself up as the champion of her cause as well as my own. I'm going to carry it through with all the power at my command. Oh, I know no

law will help me to my vengeance. That highway robbery is just between ourselves. Well, I guess I don't need any one's help to avenge it."

Hendrie had himself well under control again. He nodded as the man paused.

"Go on," he said.

"I intend to," Leyburn cried, his face livid and working with the fury that drove him. "I'm going back now to Toronto to set the machinery working. And that machinery will grind its way on till you are reduced to the dust I intend to crush you into. It will not be Labor against Capital. But Labor against Alexander Hendrie."

"And what shall I be doing?" Hendrie's eyes were alight with something like amusement.

"You—you? I'll tell you what you'll be doing when I've finished. You'll be wishing to God you had never stolen a dead man's gold."

Hendrie started. His eyes grew tigerish. But he remained silent. Leyburn saw the change and understood it.

"Oh, God, it was a low-down game, something about parallel to the ghoul on the battlefield stealing money and accouterments from the dead soldiers. Now you are going to pay for it as you deserve. Don't make any mistake. By God, Leo, I'm going to smash you!"

Austin Leyburn turned away and hurried down the trail.

CHAPTER XI

LEYBURN'S INSPIRATION

Feverish activity was going forward in all the labor controls which acknowledged Austin Leyburn's leadership. Everywhere was agitation and ferment among the rank and file of the workers, while controlling staffs worked night and day.

Austin Leyburn had projected the greatest coup ever attempted in the country. At one stroke he intended to paralyze all trade. East and west, north and south, it was his purpose to leave the moving world at a standstill.

There were many nominal causes for the upheaval. They

could be found every day, in almost every calling, each one, in itself, of a trivial nature, perhaps, but, collectively, an expression of tyranny and injustice on the part of the employers that he, Leyburn, and those others interested in the labor movement, declared could not be borne by the worker. So the latter awoke to learn of the many injustices he had been enduring, and of which, before, he had been utterly unaware.

The real cause of the forthcoming struggle lay far deeper. It found its breeding ground in the fertile realms of human nature, the human nature of the men who led the movement. They required self-aggrandizement and profit, and beneath the cloak of Principle they hid their unworthy desires from the searchlight of publicity. Principle—since democracy had struggled from beneath the crushing heel of the oppressor the word had become enormously fashionable. Its elasticity had been its success. It could be molded by the individual to suit every need. But in these days, it had become far more the hall-mark of hypocrisy than the expression of lofty ideals.

Years ago Austin Leyburn had declared his belief that some of the overflow from the world's pockets could be diverted into his own, by methods far less strenuous than those of the great Leo. Since then he had endeavored to prove his assertion.

That he had been successful there could be no doubt. He was far better equipped with this world's goods than he would have cared to proclaim from the platform to one of his labor audiences. He kept his private life hidden by a very simple process, and so much noise and bustle did he contrive in his calling that no one gave him credit for possessing any—private life.

But herein the world was mistaken. The life he displayed to his colleagues was simple and unpretentious. He lived in a cheap suite of apartments in the humbler quarters of Toronto. He ate in restaurants where he rubbed shoulders with men of the labor world. In his business he walked, or rode in the street cars. To carry added conviction his clothes were always of the ready-made order, and he possessed a perfect genius for reducing the immaculateness of a low, starched collar.

But there was another Austin Leyburn when the claims of his business released him for infrequent week-ends. He was an affluent sort of country squire. A man who reveled in the possession of an ample estate and splendid mansion, hidden away in the remotenesses of a natural beauty spot some twenty-five miles outside Toronto. Here he enjoyed the luxuries and comforts which in others were anathema to him. His cellar was well stocked with wines of the choicest vintages. His cigars were the best money could buy. He possessed a modest collection of works of art, and his house was furnished with all those things valued for their age and associations.

To this place he would adjourn at long intervals. And at such times even his name would be left behind him in the city, in company of his ready-made clothing, his scarcely immaculate collar, and the memory of fly-ridden restaurants, lest there should be a jarring note to his enjoyment as he lounged back in his powerful automobile, which was never permitted to cross the city limits.

All these things were bought and paid for by a method of making money almost devilish in its inception. Leyburn was a gambler on the stock market. He gambled in Labor strikes.

This was the great final coup he now contemplated. He cared not one jot for the injustices meted out to labor. He cared nothing for the sufferings, the privations it had to endure. Long ago he and many others of his associates had learned the fact that all strikes more or less affected the financial market. Nor were they slow to take advantage of it.

A general transport strike would send shares crashing to bed-rock prices; would send them tumbling as they had never fallen before, as even international war would not affect them. And when they had fallen sufficiently, when, in his own phraseology, the bottom had dropped out of the market, then he and his fellow-vultures would plunge their greedy beaks into the flesh of the carcass and gorge themselves. Then, and not till then, the starving worker might return to his work.

Just now he was in Calford and hard at work. While his subordinates lived in a whirl of organization, his it was to

contrive that the news of the labor troubles reached the world at large in a sufficiently alarming type. And his gauge of the alarm achieved would be the state of the financial markets.

He had only that morning returned from Deep Willows, and it was not until long after his mid-day meal that he found leisure to turn his thoughts definitely to the fresh plans he had decided upon, on his journey back to Calford.

Now, as he sat before his desk, he picked up the receiver of the telephone and spoke sharply.

"Is Frank Smith in the office?" he demanded. "Yes. I said Smith. Oh! Then tell him to come to me at once."

He replaced the instrument and leaned back in his chair. He felt that Fate had played an extraordinarily pleasant trick upon him. In his cynical way he admitted grudgingly that for once she had been more than kind. The chance of it. A loose end. Yes, he had actually found himself with a loose end, and had promptly decided to fill up the time with a visit to the greatest wheat grower in the country in the interests of his new toy, the Agricultural Labor Society. It had led him —whither?

His narrow eyes smiled. But the smile died almost at its birth, lost in a bitter hatred for the man who had robbed him upon the Yukon trail twenty years ago.

The door of his room opened and Frank hurried in. His manner was nervous, quite unlike his usual manner. He was changed in appearance, too. Nor was it a change for the better. He looked older. His eyes were painfully serious. His dress wore an air of neglect. Whatever else the work of a labor organizer had done for him there was no outward sign of improvement.

"You sent for me?" he demanded, a look of nervous expectation in his serious eyes.

"Sure." Leyburn nodded. His manner was final. It was also the manner of an employer to a subordinate. The intimacy between these two had somehow died out.

Leyburn gazed at him thoughtfully, and the superiority of his position was displayed therein. Frank experienced a feeling of irritation. Leyburn frequently irritated him now. When they had first met, the boy's enthusiasm had made him regard this leader as something in the nature of a god. Since

then he had discovered a good deal of clay about the feet of his deity.

"Guess I'm going to hand you a change of work, boy," Leyburn said at last, his manner deliberately impressive. "Say, you weren't a big hit with the railroaders." Frank winced perceptibly, and the other saw that his thrust had gone home. "Oh, I don't blame you a hell of a lot," he went on patronizingly. "You've never been a railroader—that's where it comes in. I'd say the feller that talks to those boys needs to be one of 'em. We got plenty without you, and—so I'm going to hand you a change, to the farming racket." Then he smiled. "Guess you're a bit of a mossback yourself. You'll understand those boys, and be able to talk 'em their own way."

Frank's face had flushed with the poignancy of his feelings over his failure. He felt even more the crudeness of this man's manner.

"I'll do my best," he said briefly.

There was none of his earlier enthusiasm in his assurance. Truth to tell, something of his enthusiasm had died on the night of his failure at the railroaders' meeting, and it had died after Alexander Hendrie had left him.

"That's right," said Leyburn, with some geniality. "I don't like your 'cocksures.' Give me the man out to do his damnedest. You'll make good, lad—this time. Say, I'm going to set you chasing up the work among the farms. See it's going ahead. Ther's men out to do the gassing. You'll just have to see they gas right. Get me? There's going to be a strike around harvest—this year. It's going to happen along with the transporters."

Frank was startled. There was to have been no serious movement this year on the agricultural side. Only preparations. Why this sudden change of plans?

"This year?" he said.

"That's how I said," returned Leyburn dryly.

"But I thought——"

"I'll do the thinking, boy," said Leyburn quickly. Then he grinned. "Guess I've done most of it already. You're on?"

"Why, yes." Frank was perplexed. Nor had he any definite objection.

"Good." Leyburn picked his teeth with a match. Then he went on: "You'll make your headquarters at Everton. That's where Hendrie's place is. I've got men at work there. They've been there quite a while. We're taking up that nigger question there, and punching it home for all we're worth. It's a good lever for running up wages on. The wheat men will be easy—their crops are perishable. If Hendrie don't squeal quick, he's got miles of wheat growing," he said significantly. "Of course he's only one. But he's good to work on. Now, just watch around there. Don't do a heap of big talk. The other'll do that. You'll go around the farms, the smaller ones, and do some private talk. You'll superintend the whole of that section. Guess there's a hundred and more farms in it. I'll hand you a schedule of 'em."

As Leyburn finished speaking, Frank stirred uneasily.

"Must I go on this work?" he asked hesitatingly.

Leyburn looked up sharply. There was a sparkle in his eyes.

"Sure," he said coldly.

"Couldn't you hand me another section?" Frank asked, after an awkward pause, while Leyburn regarded his averted face closely.

"Why?" The demand rapped out. It was full of a sudden, angry distrust. Leyburn was not in the habit of having his orders questioned in his own office.

But Frank's hesitation and nervousness vanished under the other's intolerable manner. Leyburn's attitude was not one he was prepared to submit to. He felt it would not have been displayed, but for his failure with the railroaders. If that was the sort of man Leyburn was—well——

"I can't do the work you want me to, round about Deep Willows," he said, with deliberate coldness.

"Why?" Again came the monosyllabic inquiry. But this time it was in genuine surprise, and possessed no resentment.

Frank found it easier to explain in consequence.

"You see, Mon—Mrs. Hendrie is—is my foster mother," he said simply. "I owe her nothing but good. I can never tell you of the sacrifices she has made for me, and of her devotion. I shouldn't like to hurt her."

Leyburn stared. There was no resentment in him now—only amazement.

"Then—then—Hendrie is——"

"Hendrie is the man who sent me to the penitentiary for five years."

Frank turned away as he made the admission. Leyburn emitted a low whistle.

"You see," Frank went on. "I had told you my story without telling you any names. I should not tell you now, only that it becomes necessary to explain my reasons for refusing to accept the work."

But Leyburn was not listening. He suddenly pointed at a chair.

"Sit, boy," he cried, his manner suddenly assuming a pleasant geniality. "Sit right down—and let's talk this thing out."

Frank was glad enough to accept the invitation. He owed this man a good deal in spite of his slight change of feelings towards him. Nor was he one to shrink from paying his debts.

"It's the queerest thing ever," Leyburn went on thoughtfully, as Frank drew up a chair. Then, in answer to the other's look of inquiry: "Why, that I should chose you to go and deal with our—organization—in Hendrie's neighborhood. Seems almost like Fate pitching him into your hands for what he's—done to you. He's hurt you, and now—now, why, your turn's coming along."

"But curiously enough, I have no desire for any retaliation," said Frank simply. "One time I might have been pleased to—hurt him. But now—well—somehow I seem to understand what drove him to it, and—I don't blame him so much. Besides——"

"Besides?" Leyburn's eyes were watchful.

"That sort of thing doesn't fit in with my ideas of Brotherhood," Frank concluded simply.

Leyburn nodded. His expression had become absurdly gentle.

"Maybe you're right, boy," he said. "You see, I'm an old campaigner. Guess I'm a bit hardened."

"That's natural, too." Frank was glad at the change in the man. He was glad, too, that he could agree with him.

"But there's no real hurt coming to Hendrie, if—he's reasonable," Leyburn went on thoughtfully. "You see, boy,

maybe it looks that way, but this process of ours is only a sharpish way of teaching these monopolists that they've got to remember there are other folks in the world who need to live. That there is such a thing as brotherhood. I'd say Hendrie's a pretty good man, but he's headstrong—as you know. He won't be told a thing. All we need from him is his example, showing all those smaller folk he understands the needs of humanity, and is prepared to do his slice for it. What are we going to do? Why, when the time comes, the time most vital to him, we're going to show him he's dependent on us, and needs to treat us right. That's all. If he treats us right, then there's no harm done. This war—you hate the word—can be run on peaceful lines if both parties are not yearning to scrap. All we've got to do is to be ready to scrap. You won't be hurting Mrs. Hendrie. You won't be hurting a soul. But you'll just stand by to defend labor if they're out to hurt us. Get me?"

Frank nodded.

"Yes. It is right enough what you say," he replied. "I know all that. But it's this strike, and all the damage it does, makes me feel sick about it."

Leyburn laughed.

"If I know Hendrie, there'll be no strike. All we've got to do is to be ready for one. Say, lad, you're a bit sensitive. I tell you we're just going to bluff Hendrie into doing what he doesn't want to do. That's giving a living wage to folk who work for him. He'll give it when the bluff's put up."

"You think so?" Frank's eagerness sounded pleasantly in Leyburn's ears.

"Sure. They all do—in the end. Wheat men are easier than railroad companies. Their crops are perishable. There'll be no real strike. So Mrs. Hendrie's your—foster mother. Say, it beats hell."

"Yes." Frank looked up. "She's a sort of aunt, too," he said unguardedly, flushing as he remembered that he could claim no real relationship with any one. "Her sister was my —mother. I don't know who my father was—exactly. I know he was called Leo, but——"

"Leo!" Leyburn started. It was with difficulty he could keep himself from shouting the name. "Leo—you said? Then you are——" It was on the tip of his tongue to tell

Frank he was Hendrie's son. But a sudden inspiration checked the impulse.

"I am—what?" demanded Frank, caught by the other's excitement.

But Leyburn was equal to the occasion.

"Not necessarily, though," he said, with an assumption of thoughtfulness. "I was going to say Italian. Maybe Leo was just his first name."

Frank shook his head.

"I don't know. I don't think I'm Italian, though," he said unsuspiciously. "You see, Mrs. Hendrie is American, as, of course, was my mother. She had been an actress. Audrey Thorne, I think she called herself, but her real name was Elsie Hanson. Still, these details can't interest you," he finished up a little drearily.

Leyburn stared out of the window for some moments. He was thinking hard. He was piecing all he had just learned together, and striving to see how he might turn it all to account in the purpose he had in his mind. If he had been amazed before on learning the name of the man who had injured Frank—amazed, and fiendishly delighted, it was nothing to his feelings now. Hendrie, Frank's father! Audie's son! Audie! Yes, more than ever Frank must be enlisted in this work. It would delight his, Leyburn's, revengeful nature if Hendrie could be made to suffer through his own son. It was a good thought, and very pleasant to him.

He turned a smiling, kindly face upon his victim.

"It's all devilish hard luck on you, boy—to be born, in a manner of speaking, without father or mother. The world certainly owes you a big debt. A debt so big you'd wonder how it could ever pay it. But the world has its own little ways of doing things. It's sometimes got a queer knack."

Frank shook his head. His smile was tinged with sadness.

"I don't seem to feel that way either," he said slowly. "I don't seem to feel any one owes me anything. Maybe I did a while back, but I don't now."

"Not even Hendrie?"

Frank shook his head seriously.

"Least of all—Hendrie. I rather fancy he's been paid all he can bear for what he did to me."

Leyburn sighed with pretended sympathy.

"You're a good boy," he said kindly. "Too good for the hard knocks life likes handing around. Maybe you'll get—compensation. However," he went on, sitting up, and assuming a business-like alertness, "we've got to put this business through. We've got to make these people give a fair wage to their workers, a wage that will leave them a margin of comfort and happiness in a dreary sort of life. Nigger labor is cutting them out, and it can't be tolerated. We're not out to injure these employers. By God, we're not! We're out with as good a purpose by them as any church parson. That's what I can't get folks to see. Our methods may be rough, but the end justifies it. They are our only ways of doing it. I tell you, boy, in this fight we are having, of man against himself—and that's what it amounts to—we have got to put all sentiment aside. Our duty lies clear before us. And when the war is over, Hendrie, and all men like him, will be the first to see the righteousness of our cause—and thank us. We take out a tooth, boy, because it aches, and it is painful to do it, but it leaves us with everlasting peace. You don't feel you can do this work I want you to do? Well, I won't press it. But"—he turned a sidelong glance upon the other's ingenuous face, now so expressive of the struggle going on within his simple mind—"but I think the teaching for Hendrie would have come well from you. Yes, it surely would." He smiled. "Good for evil, eh? And it is for his good. It is almost a duty—feeling as you do. He is a good man, but—passionate. And his passions run away with him. Seems to me it would be good to point the right road to him. Then, too, you understand his kind. S'pose I threw a hard-shouting, leather-lunged hobo at him—we wouldn't get so good a result. Not by a lot. It would be doubling the risk of trouble. Well, where would you like to work—instead?"

Frank rose from his seat and began to pace the room. Leyburn silently watched him. The smile behind his eyes was well hidden. He knew his man. He felt it to be hard work persuading him, but it was worth while.

At last Frank abruptly came to a stand before him.

"I'll do the work," he cried, with a gulp. "I tell you, Leyburn, I'd rather do anything else, but I—I believe, as you say, it's my duty to do this. Yes, I'll go, and I'll do my very best.

But I warn you, if trouble threatens Mrs. Hendrie, directly or indirectly, I'll do my best to help her, if all labor in the world has to suffer for it."

CHAPTER XII

HENDRIE SELLS

Alexander Hendrie's mood was one of doubt and almost indecision, as he rode over the hard, white trail intersecting the miles of wheat surrounding Deep Willows. He had spent an unpleasant morning with his manager. He had listened to bad reports of Monica's condition, and added to these were many unpleasant reflections upon the visit of the man Tug—whom he now knew to be the great labor leader—Austin Leyburn—to Deep Willows.

Now that the harvest was drawing near he found himself surrounded by a wonderful picture of golden glory. Under ordinary circumstances he must have reveled in the sight, for, before all things, the growing of wheat represented the chief factor in his life. But now he found little enough pleasure in the contemplation of an abundant harvest. His mind was beset with so many things which could rob him of such joy, and it was almost as if the brilliant sunlight, shining on the wealth of gold about him, had been obscured by storm clouds of a drab, depressing hue.

Angus Moraine's tale of trials and portentous happenings had been a long one. The unrest among the hundreds of workers employed upon the farms was paralyzing efficient work. The imported black labor was both unsatisfactory as regards work, and a constant source of worry in its relation with the white. Only the night before a fierce encounter had occurred between the two colors, which, but for his own timely intervention, must have ended in bloodshed, if not in some sort of deliberate lynching of six drunken blacks. He warned Hendrie with the utmost solemnity that he was riding for a serious fall, and that unless the matter was looked into at once, the threatened strike would be child's play to the brutal warfare that was daily brewing.

Thus, at Angus's earnest request, Hendrie had set out on a tour of inspection of some of the remoter homesteads on

the estate. He was going to see for himself and test the attitude of his army of workers. The truth of his manager's statements was quickly brought home to him. He soon discovered a definite antagonism toward himself in the white camps, which left him no room for doubt. But it seemed otherwise among the blacks. These men seemed contented enough. The threat of their white fellows seemed to have left them quite undisturbed. Perhaps, since their numbers were rapidly being augmented, they felt strong enough to deal adequately with any possible attack. He knew the sanguine nature of the nigger well enough to realize that his arrogance was not easily overshadowed by physical fear of his fellows.

In his heart, however, Alexander Hendrie knew that Angus was right, and he was wrong. There was certainly danger of a sort ahead. Perhaps even a danger not to be trifled with. But this did not weigh seriously with him. He felt that his interests were sufficiently safeguarded, and that which he was doing was perfectly within his rights. He could not see that defying a prejudice was to commit any crime against the canons of labor. Besides—and herein lay the secret of his obstinate determination to adhere to his policy—labor was trying to "bluff" him. He would call the "bluff" of any man. He simply would not submit. Nor, if blood were spilled, would he hold himself responsible.

But this was only a part of that which was troubling him. Far more serious than all question of labor, the man Leyburn's personal threats stood out in his mind. He did not fear him personally. It was not in the master of Deep Willows to fear any man. But he understood the scheming mind of the labor leader, and it certainly troubled him as to the direction his attack would take.

He would attack. There was no question of that. If it were through labor, Hendrie really had little with which to concern himself. That was prepared for. But he doubted if it would come through that quarter. Elsewhere he knew there were many vulnerable spots in his armor of defence.

His alert mind was not slow to fix upon his weakest spot. It was his home-life. His passionate love for Monica guided him unerringly to the one point in which he dreaded an attack most. This man Tug, as he knew him, was not one of

the bolder class of antagonists. He would not openly assail him before the world. That could never be his way. He would attack subtly, and in the direction he was sure of hurting most. Hendrie himself knew where he could be hurt most. Did Leyburn?

Something very like despair gripped him, as, in fancy, he pictured Monica's scorn and loathing for the man who was her Frank's father, against the man for his apparent desertion of her dead sister, Audie. This was the shadow that had oppressed him ever since that fateful day on which he had learned that Frank was his own son. This was the burden he had borne as the just punishment for that crime he had committed so long ago. Now the hand of Fate still seemed to be moving on, and he felt instinctively that the woman he loved better than life itself must soon be told, and he must bow before the sentence her gentle lips might pass. He could not hope. He dared not. He knew he was at the mercy of a merciless enemy who would have no scruples as to how he accomplished his end.

His busy brain traveled on and on, over possibilities and impossibilities. His imagination had become feverishly active, and its hideous limits seemed unbounded.

But amid it all he still found it possible to draw one slight satisfaction, and it was a true index to his curiously savage manhood.

It was little enough, but it was the one bright spot on his drab horizon. He found it possible to draw satisfaction from the memory of that robbery of Tug's gold. Yes, he had many enough regrets for things he had done in those by-gone days, but he was truly glad of that passionate, almost insane moment of craving when he had robbed Austin Leyburn of all he possessed in the world.

Yes, it was good—but—no, he had not robbed him of quite all. He had left him—his life. Well, Austin Leyburn had best be careful what he did. Monica's love was more precious to him than perhaps Leyburn's gold had been to the wretched man who had so laboriously wrested it from the bosom of mother earth.

His moments were very dark as his horse made its way back to Deep Willows. They were so dark that they seemed almost impossible of ever lightening. Then, as so

often happens in the midst of the blackest moments, there came a flash of revealing light. It was the desperate courage of the man suddenly rising superior to the false cowardice inspired by his love for his wife. Why should he not forestall Leyburn? Why not tell her his story himself? Why not make a desperate fight to rid himself for ever of the haunting shadow of that painful past? If lose her he must, it would be far better to lose her with the truth, the simple, plain facts upon his lips, than to be found guilty of endeavoring to wilfully deceive.

The complexity of this man was extraordinary. But whatever his faults or virtues, and the latter were few enough, his mainspring of character was a colossal courage that could not long be held under by baser considerations. He might rob, as he had done, he might even slay, yet through it all he would prove his manhood when the time for expiation came. Whatever Austin Leyburn's estimate of Alexander Hendrie he would find himself pitted against a superior manhood when he drew his sword upon him.

Reaching the home farm, Hendrie dismounted and left his horse with the waiting groom. He hurried off in the direction of the house and encountered Angus on his way from his office. The manager stopped him.

"Been around?" he inquired, without any lightness.

Hendrie nodded. He was in a hurry.

"Sure," he said.

"Well, what d'you think of things?"

The Scot's persistence was not easy to fling off.

"Can't stop now," Hendrie exclaimed. "I'll tell you later."

But Angus had not yet finished.

"Say." He paused deliberately. "Guess I've got more than I'm yearning to lose in the Trust, so I guess there's no offence in what I need to say. If you'll listen to me, Mr. Hendrie, I say, for God's sake sell, and sell quick!"

Hendrie smiled at the other's earnestness.

"I'm going to," he said easily. "I'm going right into Calford to fix it to-night."

He passed on, flinging his final words over his shoulder at the stern-eyed Scot, who promptly continued his way with a load lifted from his money-loving heart.

But the road Hendrie had set himself to face seemed beset with obstruction. At the house he encountered Doctor Fraser, who had been impatiently awaiting his return. His news was written in his anxious face, and the millionaire read it before he opened his lips.

"Trouble?" demanded Hendrie shortly, as the man detained him.

"Yes. Mrs. Hendrie has had a bad night. And—there are signs I don't like. I want you to have another nurse at once. You see, Miss Raysun is admirable for helping to keep our patient's spirits up, and all that, but I want a trained eye to be on the watch all the time. There are developments I am afraid of. If they come along we shall have to act very promptly."

"Danger?" The millionaire's face was tensely set.

"Oh, not yet. Not yet. I hope there won't be, but—we must be prepared."

In the doctor's anxious face there was none of the confidence his words expressed, and Hendrie was in no wise deceived.

"Can I see her?" he inquired sharply.

"Ye-es. I see no objection," the other returned cautiously. "All I ask is that you keep her from all excitement. That is imperative. I think it will do her good to see you. Only be careful."

Hendrie waited for no more. He pushed his way through the glass entrance doors, and hurried upstairs and along the softly carpeted corridor to his wife's sick room. At the door he paused for a moment before he knocked. His heart was beating furiously. Doctor Fraser's news had disturbed him far more than his outward seeming had admitted.

Pyllis opened the door to him. When she saw who it was she drew aside to allow him to pass in. Then, as she heard Monica's glad cry from the bed, discreetly withdrew, and closed the door.

In three strides Hendrie was at Monica's side, and the next moment her head was pillowed upon his shoulder, with his powerful arm supporting her, as he seated himself upon the downy softness of the bed.

"My poor Mon," he said gently, as he looked down into the pale, worn face of the sick woman. "I've just seen

Doc Fraser, who tells me you've had another bad night."

Monica nestled closer to this great strong man whom she almost worshipped.

"Yes, dear," she said, gazing up into his face in almost pathetic appeal. "It is the nights that are worst. It's—it's too dreadful. The moment night comes I am haunted by dreadful waking dreams. There is no peace—none whatever. Every dreadful thing, every painful moment I have ever endured in my life seems to rise up and mock at me. Sometimes I feel I shall never sleep again. And yet I suppose I do sleep and don't know it, for the dreams go on and on until daylight comes. Oh, I wish I knew what was the matter with me. This dreadful sort of nightmare I think is killing me. If only I were in pain, if only I could feel something, I believe I could bear it more easily. Oh, I wish it would end."

For a moment Hendrie had no answer. Every word Monica had uttered left a stab in his aching heart. He knew, as Phyllis knew, the cause of all this trouble. He knew, no one knew better, that he, and he alone, was its cause. Her nervous system had been driven to the breaking point more than a year ago, and his had been the hand that had driven it. His mind went back to young Frank and his own visit to him. It had seemed to promise well. Frank had desired to see Monica. But—he had not yet done so. He knew that Frank, the sight of him alone, would go far to banishing the tortures of this woman's nerves.

He stifled his feelings, and vainly endeavored to cheer her.

"I think it would do you good to go away to the sea, or the mountains, Mon," he said, in his lightest manner. "It could be easily fixed, if the Doc. says you can go. A special train, no stop anywhere. What do you think?"

But Monica only shook her head.

"I don't want to leave Deep Willows, and Phyl, and you," she said plaintively. "The happiest moments of my life have been spent here. I just never want to see Winnipeg ever again. Nor Toronto. No, dear, when our son is born I want him to be born—here."

Hendrie smiled tenderly down into the poor tired eyes. He bent and kissed her.

"Son?" he said gently.

"Yes, dear. I'm sure he will be our—son."

The man sighed. He was thinking of Frank. He was thinking of another woman who had said that to him. He was thinking of all he had come to tell this woman, and he knew he must remain silent. The doctor said she must not be excited. The way he had calculated to beat the man Tug was barred to him, and he knew he had thought more of beating him than of the honesty of his purpose.

Monica looked up at him with a little sigh.

"Tell me, dear, how are the Trust affairs going?" she asked, a little eagerly. "I seem to have lost all touch with them."

Hendrie promptly exerted himself.

"Why, things couldn't be better," he said, lying deliberately.

"I'm so glad. Your scheme will win out as your schemes always do. You are—a wonderful man, Alec." She sighed contentedly. "Tell me of them."

There was no escape, and Hendrie promptly resigned himself. He knew he must draw a glowing picture for this gentle, sick creature, who loved him, and he did his best.

He told her of the general position of things, carefully suppressing everything of an unpleasant nature, or glossing them over. He just hinted at the labor unrest, feeling it would be best to leave it alone. But Monica eagerly caught at the hints.

"Ah," she cried, starting from his supporting arm. "I knew there was labor trouble."

"You knew? Who told you?" Hendrie's surprise was marked. It was an understood thing that all that was unpleasant should be kept from Monica. He wondered if Phyllis had been foolish enough to tell her.

Monica smiled up at him. Her eyes were feverish.

"You need not be afraid, Alec," she said, with a touch of reproach in her tone. "No one has told me; no one has disobeyed orders. But it is useless to try to keep these things from me, when—they are unpleasant. Did I not tell you all my nights were crowded with dreams that are unpleasant? I have seen this labor trouble in my dreams. I have seen it, not as you talk of it, as something to be set aside as of no importance. I have seen it in its full horror of merciless

antagonism of class against class. I have seen the poverty, the misery and starvation driving the wretched workers to fierce and criminal outrages. It has been war, bitter war for existence on the part of these, and desperate defence on the part of folks like ourselves. I have seen cities in flames, with the streets running blood. I have seen the whole country-side afire, and we, you and I, have been always in its midst, with my poor Frank at the head of the mob. Oh, it has been dreadful, awful."

Monica had quite suddenly worked herself up into a frenzy of fever, and the man at her side looked helplessly on. The moment she finished speaking he sought with all his might to soothe her jangling nerves.

"These are fancies, dear," he said, in his direct fashion. "These are the distortions of the darkness you complain about. Listen, I'll tell you. None of these things can hurt us, and I don't think your Frank will ever lead a mob. His thoughts and impulses are far too exalted. For ourselves I am going to Calford to sell to-day. I am going to complete the deal before any word of labor trouble affecting us can reach the public. I sell to the speculators. Then—nothing matters."

His reassurance had its effect, and the sick woman sighed.

"I'm so glad. You are always just a point cleverer than any one else. Come and tell me about it when you get back, won't you? This sort of thing helps me." Suddenly Monica turned her head and claimed his whole attention. "Tell me, Alec, do you think Frank will ever come to me? Oh, if he would only come I—I believe these dreadful nightmares would leave me. If you only knew how I long to see him. If you——"

At that moment one of his headstrong fits seized the man. It was one of those moments when the will to do rose up in him, casting aside all reason, all caution in its tremendous purpose.

"He shall come," he cried. "I—I promise you!"

The sick woman clasped her hands in an ecstasy of hope and thankfulness.

"Oh, Alec," she cried, "you promise? Then—he will come. I can be happy now. Quite happy—till you return."

But immediately Hendrie realized how he had committed

himself. He saw ahead the added danger of failure. And in his moment of realization he rose abruptly from his seat on the bed. But he would not yield to his momentary weakness. His promise once given must be fulfilled. He must set about it at once. He knew that his desperate feelings at the sight of the sufferings of this woman he loved, had trapped him.

"I must go now, Mon," he cried, with an attempt at cheerfulness. "I must fulfill my promise. You see my going to Calford is lucky, for I believe *our* Frank is there. If he is I shall bring him back with me. Good-bye, my dearest. God bless you. Our Frank shall help you to get well."

"God bless you, Alec. You will come back to me—soon?" she cried appealingly.

The man stooped, and the woman's thin arms caught and held him in their embrace. Then, reluctantly, he moved away and passed from the room.

Beyond the door Phyllis was awaiting him. As he came out she raised a finger to her lips to enjoin silence, and led him down the corridor.

At the head of the stairs she turned, and her eyes were alight with excitement.

"I had to see you first, Mr. Hendrie," she said, in an excited undertone, as though fearful lest Monica might hear, even at that distance. "It's—it's about Frank. You know she's just all out to see him. She's dying—to see him. Well, I've had a letter from him. I'd written him, telling him he must come, and it's his answer. He—he says he's coming right away, and I've to go into Everton to meet him. I —had to ask you first. May he come—and see Monica? Will it hurt her? You see, I just guessed I'd write without saying a thing about it, and—and now he's coming."

A silent thankfulness went up from the millionaire's heart as he smiled down into the pretty, eager face before him.

"Our guardian angel," he cried impulsively. "Why, my dear, I've only just given my solemn promise that he shall come, and I was wondering how to fulfill it."

"Then he may come? The shock? The excitement? The doctor says she must be kept from all excitement," cried Phyllis doubtfully.

"Doctor be damned!" cried Hendrie, in his headstrong

way. "Happiness never killed any one. And"—his eyes grew serious and his manner less full of hope—"anyway," he went on, in a passionate tone, "I'd ten thousand times rather see poor Mon die happy than endure the heartbreaking sufferings she is doing now. Wire him, my dear, wire him not to delay, but to come along at once."

Then his manner grew thoughtful, and a touch of bitterness crept into it.

"I'm—I'm going into Calford right now," he said, "and—my absence will make it easier for him. Good girl."

He patted her gently on the shoulder, and passed down the stairs.

CHAPTER XIII

FRANK LEARNS HIS DUTY

Time had been when Frank believed that no chance of life could ever bring him to the neighborhood of Deep Willows again. Now, within a brief two years, he was eagerly watching for the familiar scenes as his hired conveyance drew near the village of Everton.

However eagerly his eyes gazed out ahead, his spirit was sorely enough depressed. He felt that he hated the golden wheat fields as they came within his view, spreading their rich carpet over the earth far as the eye could reach. He was struck, too, at the distance they had seemed to lie back in his memory. They seemed to belong to some other, long past existence that had no relation to his present. A great gulf seemed to have been crossed, a gulf, dreadful in its profundity, and somehow these lands belonged to it.

The delicious air of the plains seemed to oppress him. He felt that the invigorating breezes choked him. The golden sunlight, too, shining down upon the burnished grain, failed to raise a single pulse beat. Two years ago it would all have been so different.

But he knew that the change was in himself. Young as he was he knew that something of his youth had been snatched from him by the ruthless hand of life. He knew that here nothing was changed. The same breezes blew over the same

fertile plains. The same sun shone down with its serene splendor. The same people dwelt on this glorious land. It was only he that was different.

The change he realized made him turn his eyes upon his new aspect of life with still further questioning, and he knew that it had brought him not one moment of happiness that could compare with those by-gone days, somewhere behind him, beyond the painful gulf he still feared to gaze upon.

But an added trouble was with him now. Fate had sternly decreed that his lot was still bound up with Deep Willows. There was no escape. Austin Leyburn had morally forced this place, he wished to shun, upon him, and, further, the subtle appeal of his affections had been played upon. There was mockery in the conflicting object, of his return to the place. His whole love was bound up in two women. He was paradoxically journeying to bring comfort to the two lives he had brought pain into, while, at the same time, he knew, in spite of Leyburn's assurances to the contrary, his duty pointed directly the opposite.

His boyish mind was disturbed, his kindly heart was troubled. While he believed that his new thought was right, all his inclinations tore him in other directions, now that his affections had been brought into conflict.

At last he drove down the wood-lined main street of the village. He passed several empty, outlying houses which he remembered he had always known as empty. The rotting sidewalk of wood, too, was just the same as he remembered it. He passed the little wooden church, which possessed a bell so reminiscent of the prairie homestead. There, too, was the parson's house beside it. Then, next, a cross street, and beyond that the stores, six in number, that made up the commercial interests of the place. On the next corner stood the Russell Hotel. Yes, he could see it. There was a buggy outside it. There was generally a buggy outside it, he remembered. Whose was it? There was some one in it. Ah, yes, a woman. No, why it was—yes, it was Phyllis.

His heart beat fast as his buckboard rattled up. His eyes had grown bright with something of their old boyish smile of delight as he noted the bent head of the girl poring over a book she was reading. For the moment, all his doubts and regrets were forgotten. Phyllis was waiting for him. Wait-

ing, though he did not realize it, as she would always wait for him.

He called out a greeting as he drew nearer, and the girl looked up with a glad smile. Then, though many yards still separated them, he became aware of a marked change in her young face. She was thinner, the old freshness of her rounded cheeks had somehow sobered down to a delicate smoothness, almost thinness. The brilliant look of perfect, open-air health had given place to a delicate pallor that in no way robbed her of beauty, but quite banished the sun-tanned freshness gleaned from her work in the fields. Her eyes, too, they seemed bigger and wider than ever. Then there was her change of attire. The old Phyllis was gone. Here was a city girl in her place, dressed with simple taste, but in clothes that must have cost far more money than she could afford.

But his astonishment did not lessen his delight at the sight of her. Never had she looked more beautiful to him, never had she possessed more attraction. He knew that most of her time was spent at Monica's side, a place he often felt that should have been his. She had told him of the changes in her life, and that since Monica's illness her own home and mother saw her at week-ends only, while Hendrie's money provided that her little farm lacked not in its prosperity.

"Why, Phyl," he cried, as he came up. "You waiting for me here, like this? I might have been hours late."

The girl smiled happily as she closed her book.

"Certainly you might. But"—with a simple sincerity—"it would have made no difference. I have waited longer than this for you—before. And often enough sitting on a hard, well-polished old log."

For once Frank detected that which underlaid her words. He remembered that time in Toronto when she had ventured alone from her home to find him. He remembered that she had said she would always be waiting for him, and his boyish heart went out more tenderly to her than ever.

But what he said conveyed nothing of this.

"But this sun," he cried. "It—it is scorching."

The girl only smiled and shook her head.

"You can pay off your teamster, and leave your baggage

here. Guess you'd best get up beside me, and I'll drive you in."

In a moment the man's mind came back to all that this visit entailed. The sight of this girl had put it out of his head.

"Yes," he said, "I'll get up beside you, but——" Then he turned to his teamster. "Put the horses in the barn," he said, "and book me a room. You'll see to yourself, and wait for me here."

Then he alighted and climbed into Phyllis's buggy, and the next moment they were rolling smoothly along in the direction of Deep Willows.

Phyllis leaned back in her seat and dropped her hands in her lap. The horse was pleasantly ambling along a trail it was used to.

She looked round with a half humorous smile.

"Of course. Say, I forgot you belonged to the—enemy, Frank," she said. "I just forgot everything, but that you were coming to see Monica. You said in your letter you'd got to get right here in your—work. It seems queer. I—say, Frank, I just can't fix you as an—enemy," she cried, in a tone of raillery.

The man's eyes were on the two, small, gloved hands in her lap.

"I'm—not an enemy, Phyl," he said, in a low tone.

"Aren't you?" She laughed. "I suppose it's just friendship to us all to come along, just around harvest, and tell the boys to quit work, so as to make us poor farmers lose our crops, and keep the boys who work the harvest from making a great stake for the winter. You see, we've had men around these weeks and weeks, telling the boys that way. They're men belonging to Leyburn, same as you do."

Frank looked up with hot eyes.

"I don't belong to Leyburn," he cried. "I belong to no man but myself, and my—my convictions."

His sudden heat sobered the girl at his side. She seemed to be reduced to penitence.

"I'm real sorry I said that, Frank, I am sure. You see, I was just teasing. Guess I didn't think—except about poor Monica. You see, dear, she's so—so ill, and I don't think she'll ever get better. That's partly why I sent for you.

When this—this trouble comes I'm half afraid it'll kill her."

The man's resentment had utterly died out. In its place was a terrible, straining anxiety and grief.

"Kill her? Oh, Phyl, you can't—you don't mean that. Surely she is not so ill as all that. Surely you're just troubled, and fancy that. How—how can any labor trouble hurt her. It can't. There will be no trouble if Hendrie is—reasonable. That is what Leyburn said. He promised me that."

"Promised you?" said the girl quickly. Her mind was wide open and watchful. This boy was all the world to her.

"Yes, yes. He promised me before I accepted this work. Oh, you don't understand. You can't. We want the employers to realize their responsibilities. We want them to make the lives of those who toil for them happier and better. We want them to give them a fair wage, and let them enjoy life instead of keeping them crushed beneath the grindstone of their labor. Hendrie, I believe, will do this. Then—there can be no trouble that can hurt Monica."

Phyllis gazed out ahead and nodded.

"You, too, feared your work might hurt Monica," she said, "or you would not have made him promise—that."

Frank started. He knew that fear had been in his mind. Was still in it. But Phyllis did not wait for an answer. She turned at once to him, and her beautiful eyes were very tender as she beheld the pucker of anxious thought between his brows.

"Men are so queer," she said, with a quaint little twisted smile. "I'd say they aren't a bit like women in—some things. Say, dear, I guess it wouldn't hurt you just a little bit if I'd set right out to carry on a war against everything that belonged to your life. It wouldn't hurt you to think your son had just got right to work to make you do things that you couldn't see the justice of. It wouldn't hurt you, no matter how he told you he was your friend, if he acted the way of an enemy. To a woman that just seems dreadful. It's like your own child, the child you've done all you could to help—when he's helpless, the child you've never been too ill, or too tired to nurse and fix right, the child you'd be ready any time to give your life for, just turning right around and hitting you in the face when—when you're helpless. It doesn't mat-

ter if trouble comes or not, you're leading the folks against your Monica. While she's abed sick to death, and can't help herself, you're—you're just going to hit her in the face. Maybe it's not just only in the face. Maybe it's her poor, tired heart, that's been crying these nights and nights for sight of you."

"Phyl! Phyl! For God's sake don't talk that way," Frank burst out, a great, passionate grief in his honest eyes. "You make me out the cruelest monster living. Can't I convince you of the rightness of all I want to do? Monica? I'd give my life a hundred times to help her. I love her as never mother was loved. I would not hurt her, not a hair of her head."

"I know, dear," the girl replied soothingly. "I know all that, and—much more. I know that you are not going to hurt her. God is watching over her, and He would never permit you such a—crime. Then, dear"—she smiled her gentle smile up into his face, and her pretty teeth clipped together as she spurred herself to her final thrust—"there's another watching over her, too. But he's only an earthly creature. Still, he's a big, strong man, who's just full of all the faults which belong to all strong human nature. Yes, oh, yes. He's anything but a saint. But he sets your Mon before all things in his life, before everything, and he's—her husband. He is there to protect her, as, some day, you may want to protect—me."

The buggy rounded the last bend in the trail, and the great house came into view as Phyllis finished speaking. Frank made no answer. He had nothing to say. The girl at his side had stirred his tender heart as it had never been stirred before, and he sat gazing hopelessly out ahead at the palatial home, with all its luxury of surroundings, where the woman he regarded as a mother was denied the health and happiness which the world believed wealth could never fail to bestow.

He could not help thinking of it, though well-nigh overwhelmed with grief. All the wealth which others were crying out to share in, was hers, and yet he felt that there was greater health and happiness to be found in the houses of poverty it was his desire to champion.

No, he had no answer for this wise girl he loved. How could he answer her? His eyes were opening to possibilities

which had seemed so utterly impossible before. In his mind he had accused Hendrie, and all others of his class, of being monsters of inhumanity, devoid of heart, a race apart from those who toiled for the barest existence, and Phyllis was telling him how perfectly human were these hated creatures.

This man Hendrie was just as the rest of men. Whatever his passions, his unscrupulous methods of dealing with those who crossed his path, he shared all these things in common with all humanity. His love for Monica was just man's love for woman, only, perhaps, more strong, more vital, by reason of the wonderful strength of manhood which was his. Greater than all in his life stood out this love of his for his wife.

Notwithstanding all that had passed, notwithstanding the class Hendrie represented, notwithstanding that, even now, he, Frank, was embarked upon a mission in opposition to this very man, a strange warmth of feeling rose up in his heart for him who could so watch and guard over Monica, and strive with body and mind to keep her from all hurt.

Phyllis sat watching him covertly. Perhaps she understood something of what was passing in his mind. She understood his doubt. That there was no mistaking. She knew the value of that doubt, and wondered if it was the seed that must grow and develop, and finally bring back to herself and Monica the boy they both loved so well. She believed it was, and the comfort of the thought held her silent, too.

Presently she drew the horse up at the entrance porch. She flung the reins to the waiting servant, and sprang unassisted from the vehicle. Frank moved more slowly, and lumbered his great body from between the spidery wheels.

In silence they passed into the house. In silence Phyllis led the way upstairs. She wanted no word to pass between them now, until Frank had seen Monica.

At the door of the sick room she paused and knocked. It was opened by the new nurse, arrived only that morning from Calford. Then Phyllis, signing to Frank to remain outside, passed in and closed the door behind her.

The man waited. The minutes seemed like hours. He had forgotten everything now except that he was to see Monica again. Something of Phyllis's manner in entering that room had inspired him with a dread which no words could have

given him. He felt that perhaps he was about to see her for the last time.

At last he heard a rustle of skirts beyond the door. The next moment the nurse stood in the doorway, signing to him for silence. Then she beckoned him in.

The door closed softly behind him, and he started at the great canopied bed.

Monica was half propped up. Beside her was Phyllis, tenderly chafing her thin, almost transparent hands. He took a step toward the bed, but halted abruptly as he heard Monica's familiar voice, now high pitched and strident.

"No, no, I don't believe it. I can't have won it. Why you don't know what it means to me. Here, here's a dollar for you. I'm going to see the editor at once. Yes, he's my son and what of it? You dare." Then followed a few mumbled unintelligible words. But in a moment her voice rose to a passionate appeal. "Oh, Frank, don't leave me! Don't you understand? I love him so. No, don't go—please don't leave me. He's gone! He's gone! They've taken him to prison. Oh, God, and I shall never see him again. Five years. God have mercy, have mercy!"

The voice rambled on, now rising to a dreadful pitch, now dying down to a whisper. Now the words and sentences were plain, distinct, now there were only despairing mutterings, which had neither meaning nor continuity. Frank stood looking on in horrified amazement. He had not dreamed of such a thing. No one had even hinted at such a condition. But he could not stand there listening. He felt as though his heart must break.

Suddenly he started forward, and Phyllis, watching beckoned to him. He flung himself upon his knees at the bedside, and tried to take one of the sick woman's hands in his. But instantly Monica snatched it away.

"Don't dare to touch me," she cried, struggling into a sitting posture. "You—you have done this. You sent him to prison—and now I shall never see him again."

The sick woman's voice had risen almost to a scream, and the nurse sprang to her side. Phyllis caught Frank's hands and led him away.

"Come," she said, and together they passed hastily out of the room.

They were standing at the head of the stairs. Phyllis, with her hands clasping the balustrade of the gallery, overlooking the entrance hall, was gazing out of the window, opposite her, at the wonderful golden skyline beyond the belt of trees that marked the course of the river. Frank was beside her, half turned toward her. He was standing on the third step of the staircase.

"This delirium only started after I left this morning," the girl was saying. "She was quite—quite all right then. Oh, Frank, I don't know what to do. Mr. Hendrie is away, and —I'm afraid."

The man's emotion was no less. His face was ghastly pale, and a light of utter depression and hopelessness had dulled his eyes. At the girl's final admission he suddenly looked up, and a passionate light replaced the gloom of a moment before.

"Phyl, Phyl, I can't go on!" he cried. "I can't leave her. I must stay here. I love her. I owe her everything—everything I am. She—she is my mother. Oh, God, and to think I am even now here in the district at war with all that belongs to her. To think that I should have one single thought in antagonism to her. No, no. I can't go on with it. I must stay and help her. I must stay till—till the crisis is past. Phyl—tell me. Tell me what I can do. I love her, dear, and I want to—help her."

The man's sudden passion stirred the girl's responsive heart. But it also helped to banish her own moment of weakness. She suddenly placed one hand upon his as it rested on the balustrade beside her. It was a caress that thrilled the man, even in the midst of his trouble.

"You can't stay here, Frank, dear," she said. "It would be useless; it would be wrong."

"Wrong?"

The girl nodded.

"Yes," she said simply.

"But surely I have a right to remain, and—and help?"

Phyllis smiled tenderly.

"How?" she inquired. "Help? You would only stay around worrying and miserable. You could do no good, dear. Besides——"

"Besides?"

"Your duty lies—elsewhere."

"My duty lies here. My first duty is to my—mother!"

The man's denial came with a deep thrill of passion.

"Does it, dear?" Phyllis said gently. "I think not—yet." Then she suddenly abandoned herself to all that was in her heart for this man's good, and her voice was deep with her own emotion. "I tell you you can't stay. You surely can't. See, there's nothing for you to do around. I shall send word to Mr. Hendrie, at once. The doctor is here, and the nurses. You must go. Go right about your business. Frank, Frank, just fix it in your mind right away, there's no two roads of duty. Your bond is given. Your future is bound right up in helping folks who need your help. You cannot draw back just—just because your—mother—is sick. To do that is just yourself claiming you. Your pledge is to the workers now, and you must fulfill it. I would have you do this, sure. Say, when you're through, when you've fulfilled your duty, then it's time to come around and think of those you just love—for yourself. Frank, I'd just love to have you stay around, but I'd rather you do the duty you set yourself—now."

The man stared incredulously up into her face. He was trying to fathom the meaning of this sudden change of attitude toward the work he was engaged upon. Even at such a moment he could not help remembering how passionately she had protested against it in Toronto.

"*You—you*, Phyl, tell me to—go on? *You* refuse me when I implore you to let me remain with Mon?"

The girl looked down at him with her wise little smile.

"Yes," she said, with a sigh. "I want you to go now, otherwise—you will never be able to come back to us. Come, dear," she went on, smiling at his puzzled expression, and taking him by the hand, "I must go and send my message to Mr. Hendrie."

CHAPTER XIV

THE STRIKE

Angus looked up into the faces of the three men standing beyond his roll-top desk, which was littered with dust and debris such as no man accustomed to office work could

have tolerated. But Angus was no office man. He hated the place, and only used it when his work obliged him to.

Just now he was glad of it. He was glad of its support in dealing with affairs such as were confronting him at the moment. It helped him to an air which he felt to be necessary. Full well he knew the awe of a roll-top desk for these sons of the soil.

Now he leaned back in his chair, and his cold eyes glanced deliberately at each man's face in turn. They were russet-hued faces, bearded and unkempt. They were the faces of men strong in muscle if simple of mind. They were three of his farm hands, and each one had served under his guidance for many years. They were competent, skilled machinists, whose thought was only for their work and their weekly wage.

Angus knew them well, for willing, hard-working men, with a weakness only for taking things easy on Monday mornings, and an invincible desire to reach the Russell Hotel bar punctually at one o'clock on Saturday afternoons.

Secretly he regretted the interview; outwardly he was roughly indifferent.

The men stood silent and uncomfortable under his scrutiny, but a surly truculence was in their eyes as they endeavored to return his stare.

"So this is your—ultimatum," the manager said at last, with something of his best snarling grouch in his harsh voice. "Mr. Hendrie's got to cut out one hundred and eighty-three niggers from this place, all slap-up workers, who don't break up every blamed machine they put their hands on, because you white boys are kicking at their color." One of the men made a movement as though about to interrupt, but Angus silenced him with a gesture. "Hold on," he cried. "Guess I listened to you all you needed. I hadn't a word while you boys were gassing. Now I need to do some talk. Seein' I'm busy I'm not going to waste my time on you. So just get this, and get it good and quick. I'm running this layout. I'm paying you your wages. I'm boss. I'll run the place as I see fit. If you don't like it you can go—to hell!"

"They're undercuttin' us in price," cried one of the men, with an oath.

"They're being paid the same wages as you are—according to their class of work," retorted Angus sharply.

"Then they've no right to it, they're bl—— niggers," cried the same man.

Angus's eyes snapped.

"I don't care a cuss if they're Red Indians or Chinamen," he snarled.

"See here, Mr. Moraine," cried another, "we come here like men to tell you what's doing, so it's up to you. We refuse to work alongside a lousy crowd o' niggers. Try and force it on us, and there's not a blamed soul among us whites'll handle a binder this harvest. Your crops can rot till they stink. Every white man on this layout quits at sun-down to-day."

Angus rose from his chair, and his lean figure was bent forward as he supported himself with one hand on the desk.

"You can take your damned 'times' now," he cried fiercely. Then he shot one hand in the direction of the door. "There's the door," he shouted. "Get to hell—through it."

The three muttering figures retreated hastily. They knew this man's methods too well to hesitate. They had been chosen by their comrades to represent them, and they had carried out their mission in good faith. But from the outset they had little enough hope of success. Men on that farm had attempted to bluff Angus before. But the hard-faced Scot was a match for any man he employed. Physically he knew no fear, and his contempt for the "hired man" was profound.

They returned to their waiting comrades filled with resentment against both Hendrie and his representative. They had done what they considered their duty, a duty pointed out to them by the talkers of their union, now they were ready to listen to any counsels, and act upon them, provided they were not of a pacific nature.

Angus dropped back into his chair, with the sigh of a man at high tension.

A moment later he picked up a tinted paper, and read the typewritten words upon it. It was a message he had received that morning from the millionaire. It was satisfactorily brief.

"Fixed up everything. Hendrie."

The sight of those three words gladdened the Scot to an extent that brought a wintry smile to his lean face. Yes, he was satisfied. He knew that the deal in wheat had been made, and that the trust affairs were safeguarded. It was this knowledge that had inspired the ruthless, autocratic fashion in which he had sent the workers' delegates about their business.

Yes, now he was rather pleased at the prospect of a fight. He would rather fight than eat. That was a phrase frequently used to express the opinion the workers held of their chief. Nor was it particularly exaggerated. This hard-driving descendant of Scotch ancestors possessed a wonderful predilection for the lesser scientific art of physical self-defense, and it was the secret of much of his success in the organizing of his employer's interests at Deep Willows.

But these developments at home left many possibilities of an ugly nature, a nature that could not easily be anticipated. With strikes here, there, and everywhere about the country, strikes of sympathy, as well as strikes for definite grievance, not even Hendrie, himself, could foresee all the possibilities of mischief. Therefore, in the millionaire's absence, it became his obvious duty to distribute a universal warning to all the trust farmers.

This was no small task, but it was one that afforded him a sort of malicious satisfaction in the thought of beating these people in the game they contemplated.

Angus quite enjoyed the work. He was really in his element. The prospect of a fight warmed his heart. Almost in the same breath he blessed and cursed what he characterized as Hendrie's bull-headed obstinacy. At one moment he was fiendishly chuckling at the headlong retreat of the invaders of his office, and the next he was swearing under his breath at the man who invented pens, and such a depressing hued liquid as ink. He was wound up to his best fighting mood, and his disappointment would be keen if the immediate future afforded no further outlet for his violent spirit.

At last his task was completed, and he sighed his relief. It was well past his dinner hour when the last message was written and dispatched to the telegraph office at Everton. But food was just now of no sort of consequence. He sat

back in his chair, lit his pipe, and prepared to compose a message to his employer.

After considerable thought, and several written attempts, he completed the message. But it was not altogether satisfactory. For some moments he sat considering it, and, in the midst of his cogitations, his eye lit upon his unfolded copy of the *Winnipeg Daily Times*.

It was lying on the top of his desk. He always received the paper a day late, but it was his custom to read it every morning, immediately after his breakfast. This morning it had lain in its place neglected by reason of the coming of the delegation from the farm workers. Now he picked it up without another thought. His interest in the world's finance was far too deep to permit of any further neglect.

He turned the financial page and scanned it eagerly. Then, his appetite in this direction appeased, he idly turned over to the general news.

In a moment he was sitting up alert. In a moment all thoughts of finance, and everything else, were banished from his mind, and his whole interest became absorbed in what he read. The top headline was in vast type, and half a column was devoted to lesser "scare" headlines.

GENERAL RAILROAD STRIKE
THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY

With hungry eyes he read down the list of inconveniences and terrors by which, the paper informed the public, they were beset. Then below this he read on into the lesser type, and found the filling out of the "scare" headings in picturesque, not to say lurid, journalese. This was all for the unsophisticated, the simple, and warned them that the bubble of civilization had burst as effectually as if it had been made of soap.

Angus read it all, and it impressed him. Not, perhaps, as the editor intended, but his keen mind saw through the embellishments and detected the painful truth of the facts underneath. The possibilities were enormous. He pictured the state of chaos he and Hendrie had so often discussed, which might occur in a vast country, such as Canada, with a simple trunk route of communication running through it.

Further, his mind flew to the coming of the harvest. It was less than two weeks off. In a moment the possibilities piled up in his mind till he began to think that perhaps the picturesque journalist was right, a great and terrible national disaster was upon the country.

In the midst of it all he suddenly remembered his message to Hendrie. It was a request for him to return without delay. The memory of it made him promptly turn to the paragraph relating to passenger transport. It was brief, but very definite.

"The strikers hold the track from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific, and it is understood that if the railroad company attempts to transport either passengers or freight, under military escort, at a given signal the permanent way will be torn up at hundreds of different points all along the line. Thus, even the mails will be held up. The intention of the strikers is to paralyze the entire trade of the country, and, since the numbers of police and troops in the country are utterly inadequate to protect the thousands of miles of permanent way, it seems more than likely the strikers' orders will have to be implicitly obeyed, or a reign of anarchy will set in. It seems impossible to believe that here in the twentieth century," etc., etc.

Angus looked from the paper at his message to Alexander Hendrie, and his pursed lips emitted a low whistle.

"It looks like——"

He was muttering to himself of the impossibility of the millionaire's return, when the door communicating with the house was unceremoniously flung open, and Phyllis hurried in.

"Mr. Moraine," she cried, a little breathlessly, holding out a telegraph slip. "I want you to get this off at once. I don't want to send it by any of the house servants. It's to Mr. Hendrie. He—he—must come back at once."

Angus scowled. He eyed the paper and finally took it from her hand in no very friendly manner. If there was one thing he hated on earth it was for women to mix themselves up with affairs.

He began to read the message, but Phyllis gave him no

time to finish it. She was as near despair as ever she had been in all her young life.

"He must get right back," she declared passionately. "It's—it's—Mrs. Hendrie. I've just left Doctor Fraser." Suddenly tears leaped into her distressed eyes. "He says—if—if we are to save her she'll need to be—be operated on right away. Oh, it's awful! You—you must just get him back, and he must bring a—specialist with him. Ah—what?"

Angus pointed at the newspaper. Its headlines were staring up from the desk in all their painful crudity.

"See that?" he demanded, in his sharp way. Then he picked the paper up, and held it out to her. "Read it. There." He pointed at the paragraph relating to the transport of passengers. "I don't just see how he's to get back here with a doctor or anything else. He's wanted right here for other things, too, but——"

"Other things?"

The man nodded.

"We'll have a strike here of our own—to-night. All hands. Over three hundred of 'em."

But the girl was devouring the news. As she read, her heart sank, and all hope was completely dashed. The threatening tears overflowed down her cheeks. For the first time in her life she felt utterly helpless.

"But he must, he must, he must come?" she cried desperately. "Don't you understand? It means Mrs. Hendrie's life if he doesn't bring help. Oh, don't sit there staring. Do something. You—you've got to get him here, somehow—with a—a surgeon. Strike? Do you think we can let strikes stand in the way—when her life depends on it? Let him come by 'special'—anything so we get him here. Oh!"

Her hands flung together in an impotent gesture of desperation with her final exclamation, and even the cold heart of the manager was moved.

He leaned forward in his seat.

"Easy, girl," he cried. "You're talking foolish. You got to keep cool, and we'll think this thing out. I guess Mrs. Hendrie's turn was sudden," he said thoughtfully. "And the Doc's let her run to the last before he guessed how things were. It's their way—some of 'em. How long's she got? You see, Hendrie's hung up—same as other folks.

It's no use talking of 'specials,' but the wire's still open. Now, see here, if we've got time, maybe he can make it in an automobile. It's up to him, and I don't guess much'll stop him when he knows how things are. You find out what time the Doc gives her, and I'll wire. You see, sometimes these things—— What's that?"

Angus held up a hand and sat listening.

Far away it seemed, a low, soft note droned in through the open window. It was a deep, purring sound like the hum of the wind in overhead telegraph wires.

Suddenly the man sprang from his seat. He went to the outer door and flung it open. The girl followed, and stood beside him. The sound grew louder. At last the man turned. His excitement had given place to his usual taciturn expression. He shook his head ominously.

"That's Hendrie's automobile," he said. "If he's in it—there's a hell of a poor chance of getting a surgeon from Winnipeg."

But Phyllis made no answer. She was staring out down the trail, watching, watching for the coming of the vehicle, in the hope that Hendrie was not with it.

The moment passed. Then all of a sudden she cried out, and stood with outstretched arm pointing.

"Look," she cried. "Look, look! It is—Mr. Hendrie."

A few moments later the great machine rolled up. The millionaire, at sight of Angus and Phyllis, signed to the driver, and, instead of going on to the front of the house, the machine drew up at the office door. He leaped to the ground and came over to them at once.

"I just made it," he cried. "Got the last train out of Winnipeg. They've closed down tighter than hell. There's not a locomotive running in the country to-day—except to carry mails. Just the loco and caboose—that's all. I was dead in luck. Inside information put me wise. Say—there's going to be the devil to pay."

"There sure is," replied Angus grimly. "Say, just come right in. There's things—doing."

Hendrie glanced sharply into the man's face. Then his eyes turned quickly upon Phyllis. But he followed his manager into the office without a word.

Inside Angus pushed a chair forward for the millionaire's

accommodation. But the latter made no attempt to use it.

"Well?" he demanded, looking from one to the other. "What's—doing?"

Angus shrugged and picked up the message he had written out. He handed it to him.

"Guess that'll tell you—quickest," he said.

The millionaire took the paper. As he read the long message it contained, his eyes lit, and a half smile stirred the corners of his mouth.

Finally he looked up into the Scot's face.

"Well?" he said. "We've guessed that all along. That's not worrying any of us. You got my message? The deal's through. Every grain of wheat on Deep Willows is sold in the ear. I've sold no more, but I stand a personal guarantee for the rest. You see, I've a notion that the risk lies in my property—only. Nowhere else. My guarantee for the rest of the trust farmers, which includes your property, goes. The trust must get the full benefit of the market. This is its first year of operation, and I want to show a good result. Strike or no strike, we've got them beaten to a mush. The trust just gets to work as per schedule. Say, they can't hurt us a thing. Even this railroad strike can't seriously interfere. All it will do, if it only lasts long enough, is to send up the price of the crop. That's not going to worry us a little——"

At that moment Phyllis, unable to contain herself longer, made a move towards the millionaire. Angus saw the movement, and Hendrie became aware of it as his manager's eyes were turned upon the girl.

"Ah, my dear," he cried, still buoyant in his confidence, "guess I'd forgotten you. Eh?"

Phyllis was holding up her message. The message she had brought for Angus to dispatch.

"What, more trouble?" cried Hendrie, taking the paper with a laugh.

Phyllis made no answer. She felt sick at heart. Her unaccustomed eyes had not yet adjusted their focus to matters involving life and death. Besides, since she had first encountered Monica upon the trail, a great affection had steadily grown up in her heart for the woman, who, later, she had learned, was the woman whom Frank had always

regarded as his mother. Now, to her inexperienced mind, there seemed to be no hope for her, whichever way she looked. She was pinning her faith to this man whose strength and dominating force alone seemed possible in such an emergency. She waited, scarcely daring to breathe, watching for that ray of hope she dared to think his expression as he read might afford her.

But her hopes fell completely, still further below the zero at which they had stood. First, as she watched, she saw that ominous drawing together of the man's heavy brows, then, the naturally cold gray of his eyes seemed to change. Their stony gleam shone like the pinnacles of an iceberg in the light of a winter sun. Then they lit with a sudden violent emotion, and it seemed to her that the strength she was relying upon was about to fail her.

He looked up from the paper which fluttered to the floor from fingers which no longer seemed to obey the controlling will. He looked at Angus for a moment in a sort of dazed inquiry. Then his gaze sought the girl, and the storm burst.

"God in heaven!" he cried.

It was the exclamation of a mind which scarcely grasps the reality of the position, and yet has received the full shock.

"Why was I not told?" he demanded fiercely. "Why, in God's name, was it left till now? You Angus! You girl!" He turned furiously from one to the other. "Do you know what you've done? Do you?" He laughed wildly. "Of course you do? You've timed it. Timed it, do you hear? So it's impossible to get poor Mon the help she needs. Oh, as if I can't see. Am I blind? Am I an imbecile? You, you rotten Scot, you've always hated her. I saw it from the first. And now maybe you're satisfied. As for you, girl"—he turned upon Phyllis with upraised arms, as though about to strike her to the ground—"you're as bad. You wanted your revenge for what your man has been made to suffer. That's it. Oh, God, that I should have been so blind! Was there ever such a devilish vengeance? You, with your mild ways and simple air, you've stolen into my house that you might break my heart to square with me for your man's sufferings. And between you my Monica, my poor Mon, is lying in extremity, waiting for the help

you would deny her. You thought to hurt me, and by God! you have succeeded," he cried, his voice rising to greater violence. "Oh, yes, you've succeeded, between you. You've done more. You've—you've killed her!"

He brought one great fist crashing down upon the desk. Then he rushed on—

"That fool doctor talks of hope. How can there be hope? I tell you there's none—not a shadow. There's not a train to go through. North, South, East and West, we are cut off as if those cursed plains were an ocean. Hope?" he laughed harshly. "There's as much hope as there is in hell. That woman'll be left to die. Do you hear me? Die! And between you, some of you, you've killed her!"

His frenzy was the frenzy of a madman. It was a frenzy such as, once before in his life, he had displayed. All this man's strength was swept aside by the passionate torrent of his dreadful feelings. All power of reason was lost to him. No hysterical child could have been weaker in its mental balance than this great savage man was at that moment.

Phyllis understood something of this. Angus simply eyed him watchfully. His was not the discerning eye of the girl. His attitude was the outcome of a nature which understood violence only at its face value, therefore he was physically and mentally alert. But the girl, a mere child, saw deeper. And her observation roused her own latent courage and mentality to activity.

She saw that she must fling herself into the arena that he might be brought up to the only fighting pitch that could serve them all, that could serve Monica. She seized upon his final charge to attack him almost as fiercely as he had attacked them.

"You are talking like a child," she cried recklessly. "You're talking out of a yellow strain that lies somewhere in your own wicked heart. How dare you say such things to us—to me? It's you—you who've laid poor Monica on her bed of sickness. You, with your cruel wickedness. Your vile suspicions. It is you, alone, who's responsible, and you know it.

"Say, Mr. Hendrie," she went on, her tone changing from passionate anger to one of taunting mockery. "You're a

great man. There's no one can beat you when they get up against you. That's why you can stand there bullying and accusing us. You think to crush us right into the dust, like—like slimy reptiles. Oh, you're a great man. You're so strong."

Then, in a flash, her mockery was merged into a fierce challenge, the more strong for her very youth and girlishness.

"Prove it! Prove it!" she cried. "Prove your power against the fate barring your way. Don't stand there accusing folks who're right here to help you all they know. Save your Monica. There's time—yes, I tell you there's time—if you've the heart and courage to do it!"

She stood before him, her slim figure palpitating with the fierce emotion his madness had stirred in her. Her dark eyes flashed into his with all the courage of her young heart shining in their depths. And before it the man's insane frenzy died abruptly.

Angus, watching, beheld this girl's—this child's—victory. His cool Scotch brain marveled, and reluctantly admired, while he waited for the millionaire's reply.

It came after a long pause. It came in the hard, cold tones to which he was used, when stress of affairs demanded the concentrated force which lay behind his methods.

"Run away, girl," he cried harshly. "Run away, and leave me to think this thing out. Guess I'm sorry for what I said—— Now I just want to think."

CHAPTER XV

PHYLLIS GOES IN SEARCH OF FRANK

Hendrie's return home became something like an epoch in the life of Phyllis Raysun. It was the moment of her passing from girlhood to the full maturity of a woman. She began to see with eyes more widely open, and a mind whitted to the keenest understanding of the actions and motives of those about her.

Ever since her first coming to Deep Willows, Hendrie, with all her reason for abhorrence of him, had never failed to interest her. Nor was it long before this interest begat

forgiveness, and even liking. His colossal powers for dealing with affairs excited her youthful imagination and impelled admiration. But more than all else, his evident passionate devotion to Monica appealed to her.

When he had first learned that Monica was to yield him her woman's pledge of love and devotion, he had displayed a side of character she had deemed impossible in one of his obvious characteristics. His boisterous, almost youthful joy was quite unrestrained. She had never dreamed of such a display in anybody, much less in Hendrie, the hard, stern financier. It became painful and even pathetic in such a man.

But now, since the latest scene in Angus's office, she had read the real truth of his personality. She had always watched and studied him closely, she had detected many almost unaccountable weaknesses, but when the climax in her observations was reached in his insane outburst, she felt she held the key to the driving force which hurled him so frequently blundering down the path of life.

To her he appeared a complex mechanism tremendously organized in one definite direction, which left all other directions utterly uncontrolled. All his life, it seemed to her, he had concentrated his mind and energies upon the process of accumulating wealth, and the power of wealth. Nothing else had been permitted to appeal to him. He had rigorously torn every other inclination up by the roots and flung them aside, to be left behind him in the race to win his ambitions. He had treated himself like a mere thinking machine, a machine to be driven in the only direction in which he desired to think. He had utterly forgotten that he was a human being, created with a hundred and one feelings, all of which must be duly cared for, and used, and controlled. The only control over his more human passions he had ever attempted to use must have been of a nature which endeavored to crush them out of existence.

Now the result was manifest. Human nature had rebelled. Human nature was fighting for its existence. The human nature in him all uncontrolled by careful, studied training, drove him whithersoever it listed. All his great, machine-made brain broke down before its tremendous flood-tide, and he was swept along upon its bosom toward the

brink of disaster. His passions once stirred, there was no telling where they might bring him up. She believed that under their influence he would stop at nothing.

Fortunately it seemed that all his passions were wrapped up in Monica. She was certainly their guiding star, and from this thought she drew comfort and hope. She felt that if Monica could only be saved, all would be well with him. While, on the other hand, her loss suggested to her imagination possibilities all too dreadful to contemplate.

Thus was her fevered anxiety stirred to its limits during the rest of the day, and the following morning, Doctor Fraser was to make his final examination of his patient, and give his definite verdict to the husband. Phyllis dreaded that verdict. Whatever it might mean for Monica, it was the man for whom she most feared.

Her mind was kept fully alert for all that was passing during the time of waiting. She knew that Hendrie kept himself tremendously busy. She knew that the wires were speeding messages from the house at Deep Willows, and it required little trouble to find out that Professor Hinkling, of Winnipeg, was in direct communication with the master of Deep Willows. She ascertained, too, that he was the greatest surgeon in the country for all matters to do with Monica's condition.

Then Angus had disappeared, and Hendrie was left at the head of affairs at the farm. Here, too, she soon learned that he had been speeded to Calford in the automobile to endeavor, by every means known to the power of money, to arrange for a special train to be allowed to run from Winnipeg to Calford, and bring the great surgeon to Monica's aid.

All these things left an atmosphere of suppressed excitement and anxiety pervading the whole place, and, coupled with the strike of farm hands, which, as promised, began at sundown, a chaotic state seemed to reign everywhere.

The real crisis arrived with the hour of the noonday meal. The entire household was aware that Doctor Fraser's report was due at any moment. Phyllis and the millionaire sat down to their meal together. Neither required anything to eat, and only Phyllis made any pretense. Hendrie sat at the head of the great table, surrounded by all the luxury

he had heaped upon his wife, wrapped in morose silence. His attitude was such that even Phyllis feared to arouse the storm she felt to be brooding behind his sullen eyes.

It was in the midst of the final course that Doctor Fraser made his appearance. Phyllis felt her head whirl at sight of his pale, grave face. Then, with an effort, she pulled herself together, and covertly watched the millionaire.

A strange light had crept into his eyes, as the thin, clever face appeared in the doorway. It was a light of desperate hope, of a heart yearning for some trifling encouragement where conviction made all hope impossible. She pitied this man of millions from the bottom of her heart.

But Fraser was speaking in slow, deliberate tones. He was reciting the medical aspect of the case, and, though only understanding half of what he said, the girl listened acutely. Finally he summed up the situation.

"It means this, Mr. Hendrie," he said, with a gesture, the significance of which was quite unmistakable. "Nominally, I suppose, there are two lives at stake. I contend there is only one. I think we can put the child's life out of the question. The complications are such that there is little doubt the child would be still-born. Everything points that way. Anyway, in my opinion, the complications are such that it would be absolutely fatal to allow Mrs. Hendrie to face the labors of child-birth. In a younger woman there might have been a shadow of hope. In her case I am convinced there is none. In my opinion—mind it is but one man's opinion—you have only one alternative. The child must be sacrificed by operation."

Phyllis's eyes were upon Alexander Hendrie's set face. She beheld the strong, drawn mouth twitch nervously. She also noted that one great fist was clenched tightly as it rested upon the white cloth of the table.

She sighed as she awaited his reply.

Suddenly he raised his head, and his passionate eyes shot a swift inquiry into the doctor's face.

"And the time limit—for the operation?" he asked.

He was thinking only of his wife. Phyllis understood.

The doctor deliberated.

"A week. Perhaps less."

Phyllis caught her breath.

"How much less?"

The exactness of Hendrie's mind demanded satisfying.

"Safety in five days. Risk in seven. That's the utmost limit."

Again the girl caught her breath. Hendrie did not move a muscle. Presently he spoke again.

"Failing—all else—will—you undertake the operation?"

Doctor Fraser cleared his throat.

"It is my duty," he said slowly.

Then he passed one hand quickly across his forehead as though striving to remove a weight from his mind.

"For God's sake, don't let it come to that, Mr. Hendrie," he cried. "I am an ordinary practitioner. This is a desperate case for a specialist. If you offered me a fee of one hundred thousand dollars I'd gladly refuse it. Surely you can get Hinkling here in time."

Suddenly Hendrie's fist lifted and crashed down upon the table.

"Yes, by God, yes!" he cried.

Then he sat quite still. A moment later he ran his fingers through his hair, and they remained there while he spoke very quietly.

"I'd pay you half a million," he said, in a low, deep voice, "if I thought you could do this—successfully. As it is I wouldn't offer you ten cents. I'm sorry—Doc—but——"

He rose from the table and walked heavily out of the room.

Phyllis followed his example. As she passed the doctor she paused.

"Is there no—hope?" she asked pleadingly.

The man shook his head.

"None—unless Hinkling can be got here—in time."

She passed on out of the room without a word. There was nothing more to be said. Anyway she was quite beyond words.

Phyllis went straight to her bedroom. She could not go to Monica yet, with the knowledge of what she had just heard. It was dreadful. It seemed utterly, utterly hopeless. Five days. Seven at the most. Seven—and the railroad completely shut down. Monica's life must be sacrificed because some wretched workman was not satisfied, or some

equally absurd thing. It was too awful to contemplate.

In the extremity of her grief her thoughts strayed to Frank. It was the natural womanly impulse causing her to turn to the man she loved. As the boy's image rose before her distraught mind she remembered that he belonged to those who had brought this desperate state of things about. And in her moment of realization she cried out her bitterness—

"Oh, Frank, Frank, how could you?"

The words echoed through the silent room, and came back to her with startling effect. She shivered at their sound, and flung herself upon her bed in a passion of grief. She remained there sobbing for many minutes. The strain had been too much for her, and now the hopelessness of it all wrung her heart.

But after a while the storm passed, and she sat up. Then, once more, she abandoned herself to thought. Curiously enough, Frank was still uppermost in her mind. A wild longing, quite impossible to resist, to see him, and tell him of all that had happened, possessed her, and she tried to think where he might be found.

She did not know. She could not think. He was in the neighborhood. That was certain. But where, where? She paced the room puzzling her brains as to how she might find him. Then, quite without realizing her actions, she opened a drawer in her bureau and drew out the riding suit Monica had given her. She had only worn it a few times before Monica had been taken seriously ill. She looked it over. It had been her great pride—once. Its divided skirt and beautiful long coat had been a positive joy.

Suddenly an irresistible impulse made her lay it out on her bed. The next moment she began to remove her own costume.

Far out on the outskirts of those wheat lands which acknowledged the direct control of the master of Deep Willows, at a point where the cultivated land yielded to the wood-lined slopes of the river valley, a great crowd of men, made to look almost insignificant by comparison with their wide surroundings, were listening eagerly to a speaker, perched upon the prostrate form of a huge tree trunk.

It was evening, and the westering sun lolled heavily upon the skyline, cradled in a cauldron of fiery cloud rising to bear it upon its long night journey. Everywhere was the profound peace when Nature composes itself for repose at the close of day. The air was sweet with the perfume of ripening foliage, blended with the dank which rose from the racing waters below. It was a moment for peace and good-will; it was a moment when all life should yield its thanks for blessings bestowed by the unseen hand of Nature; it was a moment when the heart of man should bow before the Creator of a beneficent life.

Yet neither peace nor good-will reigned. The arrogant heart of man was stirred by passions of discontent, and even evil. Life and all its benefits and blessings they possessed, and possessing them they cared nothing for such possession. These things were forgotten in a craving for more. This crowd was foregathered that it might learn how best to satisfy its discontent, which had been stirred by mischievous tongues in hearts hitherto contented.

The man on the tree trunk was no mere flamboyant orator preaching a doctrine of profound socialism. He was not talking "principle," so beloved of the tub-thumper. He was there with a mind packed full of venom against one man, a venom he was spitting into the ears of these workers for that one man's undoing.

This man had traveled far to satisfy his hatred. He had put himself at enormous inconvenience to address this meeting. His coming, too, had been heralded by other talkers, who were his satellites. His audience had been promised the joy of listening to the words of the greatest labor leader in the country; the privilege of hearing what the most powerful figure in the country's labor movement had to promise them; what he could do to wrest from their employer a bettering of their lot.

Austin Leyburn was paying something like a secret visit to those people, and so carefully had his coming been nursed that his words became as the words of divine inspiration to those dull-witted workers he was addressing.

It was the first evening of the strike at Deep Willows, and his coming had been anticipated in another way. A liberal supply of drink had found its way to the strikers. No one

quite knew where it came from. No one cared very much. It was there for their indulgence, and they thirstily availed themselves of it.

The result was all that might have been hoped by those whose mischief was at work. A sense of elation prevailed. A sense of injustice against Alexander Hendrie was uppermost in blurred minds. A vaunting demand for something, something they did not possess, lay at the back of pretty well every mind, and an arrogant determination to possess it was stirring. Then, too, prejudice against the colored race became a prejudice no longer, it had swiftly lashed itself into an active hatred that suggested grave possibilities.

This was the attitude of mind desired, and carefully fostered, before the great man's words could be received as he demanded they should be received. Then, with a blare of oratorical trumpets he appeared in their midst.

It was the perfection of organization, organization such as only Austin Leyburn understood.

Frank had been abroad among the smaller farms in the district, pursuing his work with indifferent enthusiasm. Now he was returning to Everton for the night, weary in body, but still more weary in heart. His mind was full of that which he had witnessed in Monica's home. He was thinking of the mother he had always known, lying in her richly appointed sickroom, crying out in her delirium all the pain and anguish through which she had passed, and was still passing.

Something was urging him to hasten on his way, and, hastening, to diverge, and break his journey at Deep Willows. He felt that he could not pass another night, he could not endure another day of the work that had somehow grown so distasteful to him, without ascertaining Monica's condition. It was little more than twenty-four hours since his mind and heart had been distracted almost beyond endurance by a sight of her sufferings. And during those few hours he seemed to have passed through an eternity.

His way brought him along the north bank of the river. It was a short cut to the boundary of Hendrie's wheat lands, which he must skirt on his journey to Everton. His horse was tired. It had been under the saddle since noon.

He had been riding along the lower slopes down by the

river bank, and, as he came to the limits of Deep Willows, he dismounted and led the weary creature up the steep sides of the valley.

It was just as he neared the shoulder of the rising ground that a sudden burst of cheering startled his horse and made it lunge backwards, and it was some moments before Frank could pacify it. At last, however, he induced the frightened beast to stand. Then he hitched it to a bush and moved forward on foot.

He, too, had been startled, but he guessed something of the meaning of the cheering. He had heard so much of that sort of thing lately. It seemed to him that his whole life was spent listening to crowds of dishevelled creatures cheering men who made them promises which could never be fulfilled.

He made his way through the foliage, and as he feared its fringe he moved more cautiously. Nor was he aware of his caution. There was no reason for it. If this were what he suspected it was, a strike meeting, it was surely his duty to witness it. However, his movements became cautious, even furtive.

A moment later he was glad they had been so, for, as he pushed the last of the bush aside, and beheld the crowd beyond, and saw the figure of Austin Leyburn addressing it, and heard his powerful voice hurling invective against Alexander Hendrie from his tree trunk, he thanked his stars that his presence was unknown.

Austin Leyburn here! Austin Leyburn in the neighborhood of Deep Willows, while the great railroad strike was in full operation! It was almost unbelievable.

These were something of Frank's amazed thoughts as he watched the gesticulating figure silhouetted against the ruddy skyline.

But now, as he stood, the man's words reached him, and, in a moment, their startling purpose held him spellbound.

What was that he was saying? Hark!

Leyburn's harsh voice rang out in clarion tones—

"I hadn't intended to come along yet, boys," he was saying. "I hadn't intended to come till next year. You see, this is a new union, and funds are not big. It needs money to fight these gilded hogs. But when I saw the way things

were going; when I heard the way you were herded alongside a crowd of lousy niggers, and set to work with 'em, like a pack of galley slaves; when I heard these things, and learned that these dirty blacks were taking the place of legitimate white workers for less wages, then my blood just got red hot, and I couldn't sleep o' nights. Say, boys, it broke me all up. I couldn't eat nor sleep till I'd rushed through a financial arrangement with other labor organizations, which sets you clear beyond the chances of want. There's money and plenty for a strike right now. Money and plenty to kill the harvest of these swine of men who roll about in their automobiles, every bolt of which, every soft cushion they sit on, has been paid for by the sweat of your big hearts.

"What's your wages? A dollar a day? Don't you wish it was? Don't you wish they'd let you have it? I was going to say 'earn' it. By hell, earn it! You're earning hundreds a day for this skunk of a man, Hendrie. Hundreds and hundreds. Say, he's got millions, no one knows how rich he is, and you boys are the fellows who earn it for him. Do you get that? Do you get its meaning right? Here's one man sits around on top, with you boys lying around whining at his feet for a fraction of the result of your own work."

Frank murmured the word "syndicalism" to himself. But the rabid tongue of Leyburn was still at work.

"Say, d'you know what set war raging between the northern and southern states? Do you know what set sons and fathers at each other's throats? I'll tell you. It was the high-minded folk of the north couldn't stand for slavery, even of the blacks. Do you know what you are to-day? You're slaves, slaves of this man—white slaves. 'Out you go into my fields,' he says, 'and I'll let you live—just live—that's all. His fields, mark you. His! By what right are they his? Ain't they yours? Didn't the Creator set you out here just the same as him, and hand you this world for your own? His fields! And out you go into them, and you grind, and sweat, and you fill his safe full of money, so he can live in a luxury you can never enjoy."

"The cur," muttered the listener. "The miserable cur." Something stirred behind him, but it remained unnoticed.

"Listen to me," Leyburn shouted above the hubbub of agreement and applause which arose from the half-drunken portion of the crowd. "Do you know what's going to happen right here, quite soon? Course you don't. You don't know these gilded hogs same as I do. I'll tell you what's going to happen. Hendrie told me himself. He says niggers are easier dealt with than whites. He says he can get them cheaper. He says they work just as well. He says he'll run Deep Willows on black labor entirely—soon, just as soon as he can get enough of 'em. He cares nothing for any of you, not even for you boys who've worked years for him. Out you got to go—the lot of you, so he can make bigger money out of the black. Get that? You know what it means to you? Will you stand for it?"

A great shout of "no" accompanied by a yell of blasphemy greeted his challenge.

"All lies, lies, lies," muttered the listening man, and a soft-voiced echo from somewhere behind agreed with him.

"Of course you won't," Leyburn roared, with a harsh laugh. "And that's why I'm right here talking to you, because you're the real grit. You've quit work to-night, and you're going to get your strike pay right away, and when you get it, I'll tell you what you'll do, if you'd beat this skunk into treating you right. There's his crop—worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. You reckon to let it rot at harvest. Will it rot? Mind he's still got his rotten black slaves. Do you know what he'll do? No, you hadn't thought of it. But I'll tell you. He'll set them to work it. While you're making a stand for labor, his black slaves'll rob you of the fruits of your work. See?"

Another fierce shout went up from the audience, and the speaker grinned his delight.

Frank waited breathlessly for what was to follow, and a low sigh, like the breath of the night breeze in the trees, sounded behind him.

"Now, you're going to beat him, and I'll show you how. See this?" Leyburn drew a box of matches from his pocket, and held it up for all to see.

"Fire the damned crop," shouted a voice in the crowd. And in a moment the word "fire" roared from a hundred tongues.

The speaker nodded and laughed.

"That's it," he cried. "Make a big bluff at him, and he's got to weaken. He won't listen without, so he'll have to be made to listen. Fire his crop, and you steal his purse. It's fair game. This is war—labor war. Fire his crop, and he's on his knees, and you can make your own terms. The damned niggers don't amount to a row of shucks. If they butt in, out 'em. Get after 'em with a gun, shoot 'em up—the crowd of you. Then the government'll get busy and stop black labor in a white country. They can't afford to quarrel with the workers. They want their votes. They're yearning for office. Get redhot after the niggers and out 'em. Chase 'em back to the place they belong. Are you on?"

A great cheer rose from the crowd. It was prolonged. And with it was the laugh of mischief Leyburn wanted to hear. He knew that he had tickled their sense of humor, and love of violent horse-play. Firing the crop appealed. But, even more, the routing of the niggers would be a joy not readily missed.

"That's it," Leyburn cried. "But before I've done I want to say right here——"

Frank passed one great hand across his perspiring forehead. It was unbelievable that it could be Leyburn urging these men to nothing less than anarchy and crime. He could scarcely credit his ears. Yet there it was—and he was still speaking.

A furious and utter loathing for the man, even for the cause of the benighted worker, rose up in his heart and sickened him.

"It's awful!" he said aloud.

"It's the saddest sight I've seen in my life."

Frank swung round at the sound of the voice. In a moment his arms were outstretched.

"Phyl!" he cried. "You?"

Phyllis caught his hands and held them tightly.

"Yes, Frank. I've—I've been chasing for you all the afternoon. Say——"

"Oh, Phyl, Phyl, did you hear? Did you hear all that man said?" Frank broke in. "That's Austin Leyburn. That's the man to whom my duty is pledged. Was there ever such a lying, despicable traitor to humanity? He tells

PHYLLIS CAUGHT HIS HANDS AND HELD THEM TIGHTLY

them to burn—to kill their fellows. And that's the man whom I have been helping. Never, never, never again. Just God! I have done with it all. Was there ever such vile criminal teaching or methods? Thank God, my eyes are open to it all—at last."

Phyllis drew his two hands toward her and placed them about her neck. Then she reached up to him, tip-toeing, and kissed him on the lips.

"And I thank God too, dear."

The man drew her to him in a great embrace.

"Never again, Phyl," he said more calmly, after a moment. "Never again, so long as I live." He kissed her tenderly.

Then, as the strident tones of Leyburn still reached them, the girl looked up.

"Frank," she cried, with a slight start. "I had almost forgotten. You made me forget. I—I came to find you. I want you to come back to Deep Willows. Will you come? Mr. Hendrie is there."

"Alexander Hendrie?"

"Yes."

The man stood silent for a moment, and the girl's eyes became intensely earnest.

"Will you come and tell him—what we have heard—tonight?" she begged. "Will you come and tell him—what you have told me? But it's not that I want you for most. There's trouble around. Desperate trouble for—for Monica." She clasped her hands in her anxiety. "Oh, come—come and help. Come and help us—her. Doctor Fraser says she cannot live unless—unless she is operated on by—by a surgeon from Winnipeg. But the railroad strike has made it impossible to get him—in time."

Frank started back and his arms dropped abruptly from about the girl's slim body.

"Monica?" he cried. "Monica dying?" Then, with a gasp. "Oh, God, and I helped to make that strike!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE DAWN OF HOPE

ALEXANDER HENDRIE started round at the sound of the servant's voice.

He was in the library. Night had fallen, and the room was in darkness. He had been staring blankly at one of the windows, across which the curtains had not yet been drawn. For hours his mind had been concentrated upon the one eternal problem which confronted him. He was beset with doubts, hopes, fears, each one of which he examined closely, dismissed or accepted, and pigeon-holed the latter in the back cells of memory for future use.

The man was obsessed with one idea only. The fulfilment of Doctor Fraser's demands, and the saving of the one precious life which was far more to him than his own. The nervous tension at which his efforts left him made him literally jump at the sound of the voice of the man who had entered the room so silently.

"Miss Raysun would be glad to know if you would spare her a few minutes, sir. She say's it's a matter of importance."

The millionaire swung his chair about, and faced the man in the darkness.

"Turn on the lights," he said sharply. "You can draw the curtains; then tell Miss Raysun to come right along."

The electric switch clicked and the room was flooded with light. Then the servant crossed the room silently and drew the curtains. Then he moved over to the door, hesitated, and finally stopped.

"She has some one with her, sir," he said doubtfully.

This man was in full possession of the gossip of the house. Besides, he valued his position.

"Who?"

Hendrie's question came with an alert inflection. He understood the man's doubt.

"It's Mr. Smith—Mr. Frank Smith—I think, sir."

"Well?"

There was no mistaking the tone of the second inquiry. The man hastened to remedy his mistake.

"Beg pardon, sir, I—I thought I'd just mention it."

"That will do."

Hendrie appeared to occupy himself with the papers on his desk as the man hurried out.

But the moment he was alone the millionaire gave up the pretense. Again he sat back in his chair, and gazed unblinkingly at the reading lamp before him. All in a moment, it seemed, from comparative indifference at Phyllis's desire for an interview, his mood had leaped to impatience for her coming. Frank was with her—why? Here, at a moment when he knew he was face to face with, perhaps, the greatest disaster of his life; here, when almost every man's hand seemed to be turning against him; here, when all his powers of achievement were being taxed to the limit, he was to be confronted with his own natural son, Frank. Again his groping mind questioned—why?

Thought traveled swiftly back over other scenes, scenes he would gladly have shut out of memory—now. But they were always there ready to confront him with his own misdoings. He thought of the poor woman on the lonely Yukon trail. He thought of the hardships with which she must have been beset. He thought of the young life-burden she had been bearing. Then he remembered the stalwart youth who had refused to betray Monica's secret, preferring to face penal servitude as an alternative. Then he remembered the honest youth championing the cause of the oppressed before his cold argument. And again he questioned the meaning of his coming now.

But his reflections were cut short. He glanced across at the door as it opened, and Phyllis hurried in. She was still dressed in her riding suit, her face and eyes, beneath the soft, wide-brimmed prairie hat she was wearing, shining with an excitement she could hardly restrain. Behind her came the great figure of Frank, and the millionaire's eyes were for him alone.

He rose and silently placed a chair for the girl. But Phyllis refused it and remained standing. She turned to Frank.

"You sit down, Frank," she said, with a peremptoriness begot of her excitement.

Without thinking the man obeyed.

Hendrie's eyes were still upon him.

"Well?" he inquired, almost gently.

Frank glanced up at the girl. The situation troubled him. But the memory of the scene he had just witnessed was still with him, and his sudden and utter loathing for the man Leyburn sent hot words surging to his lips.

"I hadn't a thought to come here, Mr. Hendrie," he cried, on the impulse of his feelings. "Maybe you won't thank me for it, anyway. Still, I've got to tell you things. I've come to tell you, you were right, and I was all wrong. I've come to tell you there's no honesty in these professional leaders of labor—to tell you that the whole game is a baser and far worse side of the competition of life than is that of the men it is directed against. Yes, I see it all now. The bonding of labor is the raising of an army of physical force, normally to work peacefully for its common welfare, but, in reality, to tyrannize and to wrest by any means in its power, by violence, by fire, by bloodshed, if necessary, those benefits which it covets, regardless of all right and justice, and which, individually, its members have not the capacity to achieve honestly for themselves. I want to tell you this now while my heart is burning with the realization of the truth; while my eyes are open to the deviltry of these men who endeavor to blind the world to their own selfish motives by crying out in the name of justice and fair dealing. There is no justice in them. It is all self, and the purblind workers are the helpless tools by which they seek to achieve their ends. I have done with it forever. There is no such thing as universal brotherhood—there never can be. You are right. So long as human nature remains human nature, self will dominate the world, and charity must become a luxury for moments of cessation from hostilities in the battle of life."

The tide of the man's hot words swept on without pause for a second, and both Phyllis and the millionaire knew they came from his heart.

But now, having made clear his own feelings, he rushed headlong to the warning he had to impart.

"It doesn't matter—the details—how I witnessed it, how Phyllis, here, shared with me in the contemplation of a scene such as we never want to witness again. It was the

man I have been working with, the most prominent figure in the labor movement of this country, the man who has organized the railroad strike which is to bar the way to the help my moth—Mrs. Hendrie needs, talking to your workers who are on strike."

"Austin Leyburn," said Hendrie dryly.

"Yes," cried Frank. "That is the scoundrel who disguises his villainous heart under a cloak of philanthropy. That is the man. He has come down here secretly, leaving his legitimate work at Calford and Winnipeg to incite your hands to burn your crop out, and to drive the niggers off the land by violence, by shooting them down. Why he has come is beyond my comprehension. I can only imagine that he has some personal grievance against you which he wishes to satisfy. Whatever it is the fact remains. The men have been made half drunk, when they cannot be wholly responsible for their actions, and he is urging them to burn you out and shoot up the niggers. Mr. Hendrie, something's got to be done at once. I don't know what, I don't know how, but that man is driving them to a great crime which they would never otherwise dream of. That crime must be stopped. Oh, if I could only think how. But I can't. You—you, Mr. Hendrie. It is for you to think of this thing, and whatever your plan you can count on me for—anything."

Frank was leaning forward in his chair. His great hands were clasped, and hung down between his parted knees, upon which his elbows rested. The earnest light of his eyes was shining with a deep fire, and Phyllis, watching him, yearned to fling her arms about him, and tell him something of the love and sympathy running such riot in her heart.

Alexander Hendrie had turned toward his desk. A paper knife was in his right hand, and its ivory blade was gently tapping the pad of blotting-paper spread out before him.

He spoke at last, and his manner was quite unusual. Ordinarily he would have attacked the threat against himself in a sharp, brusque way. But somehow Frank's presence had a distinctly softening effect upon him.

"It's not easy, is it, boy?" he said, glancing round with a half-smile.

"Easy? But it—means murder. Murder of those niggers."

The thought revolted the man. It seemed to him that Hendrie had missed the appalling nature of the situation.

"Yes. It looks like it," said Hendrie, still almost indifferently. "But I think we can save that. The moment Angus returns the niggers can be scattered. Angus will be back soon—to-night."

"To-night? But we must act—now."

"Yes." Hendrie agreed. Then he smiled confidently. "But there's more time than you think, boy. I know men. These boys won't start shooting till they've worked themselves up to it. They'll likely work 'emselves up by firing my crop."

Frank started incredulously.

"You—you will let them?" he gasped.

Phyllis was watching the millionaire. He shrugged.

"It'll help to manure the soil—for next year," he said indifferently.

"But—but—the loss!" Frank's protest came in an awed whisper.

Hendrie smiled.

"That's up to me," he said enigmatically. Then he faced round, and fixed Frank with his steady eyes. "See here, listen. You don't just reckon all this means to me—your coming and telling me this, and that other—that you've quit Austin Leyburn," he said. "It's put something into me. I can't just explain—now. But I want to tell you of other things. There's things in my mind just now that make matters like the burning of my crop, yes, and even the shooting up of niggers seem kind of small. Don't think I'm standing for a racket like that. No, sir. We'll see those black devils right, or—— However, it's about this Leyburn. Guess you're right. He's got a grievance, and it's so big it's got to come to a burst up between us. One of us'll have to get right down and out." He drew a deep breath, and his manner became thoughtful. "Guess it'll have to be Leyburn," he said, after a pause. "Yes, there's work for me yet." Suddenly he looked up with a question in his eyes. "Say, boy, you don't owe me a hell of a lot. And yet you come to me with—all this?" He gazed thought-

fully, studying the strong, earnest young face before him.

"I told you I hadn't thought of coming until——" Frank broke off as Phyllis completed the explanation.

"I persuaded him, Mr. Hendrie. You see——"

"I guessed that." Hendrie nodded. Then he smiled. "Guess it's generally a woman fixes things easy for menfolk, when the road's rough."

Then quite suddenly he leaned forward in his chair, his great hands gripping its arms with enormous force.

"Say, you two," he cried, a sudden fierce light shining in his eyes, "we're wasting precious minutes. You, boy, you've come to me with talk of this crime to be committed. Guess your heart's just full of it. But I've no room for it now. I'm just full to the brim of another crime that your man Leyburn's committed. He can burn my crop; he can shoot down every nigger in the country for all I care, while this other thing is threatening. Say, there's no nigger or white man I'd raise a hand to help if it's at the expense of one moment I need to stop the completion of that other crime. Boy, boy, I don't care if the roof of this world falls in and crushes every living soul, so long as Monica is saved. She, and she alone, is my one thought, and I tell you right here that if she dies—she will not die alone. Oh, don't think I am mad," he cried, as Frank stared in alarm at the passionate, working face. "I am sane—sane as you are. Now answer me, answer me as you love your God, as you love the woman who cared for you from your childhood. Why are you here? I want the blank truth. You have no love for me, and that you've cut Leyburn out of your life is insufficient reason. Why—why are you here?"

He gazed into the boy's face as though he would compel him. Phyllis waited without a word.

Frank needed little consideration. His reply came promptly, and full of sincerity.

"I came to see if I could help her in any way," he said. You're right. I should not have come for those other matters. Phyllis could have warned you. I am not here because of you. I am here because I—I helped to make that railroad strike, and I love my—I love Mrs. Hendrie. I said you could count on me for—anything, and I meant it. I'd willingly sacrifice everything, even my life, for Monica."

Hendrie suddenly released his hold upon the arms of his chair and sat back. His eyes were smiling, and, just for a moment, a wave of great peace swept over his stormy heart.

"I'm glad, boy," he said simply. "Monica is lying upstairs surrounded by everything the world can give her but the help which alone can save her life. You owe her much, but you owe her nothing compared with my debts to her. Now she is in need of the payment of every outstanding debt, and it is up to us. How can we bring Professor Hinkling from Winnipeg? That is the question that is now filling my heart and brain. When we have solved it, when that help is brought to her, then some of our debts will have been paid. How? How? How can this be done? How can this man Leyburn be bested. How?"

The man's words came hotly. He was not asking his questions of the others. He was simply reiterating the straining thought in his mind. Phyllis understood this, but Frank accepted the question as addressed to himself. His mind was not subtle. His simplicity at times was almost childlike. His prompt answer had something of that nature in it now.

"Why, the railroad is the only way," he said.

Hendrie threw up his hands in an ecstasy of irritation.

"The strike, man! The strike!" he cried. "There's not a passenger can travel. If it were attempted the permanent way would be torn up by Leyburn's orders. The railroad company would never risk the attempt.

Frank's eyes opened wide.

"Well?" he cried. "That's all right. If he can order the track torn up, he can order a train through—or order the strikers to let a train through."

The millionaire's eyes were fixed on the other's ingenuous face. He was exasperated at what he considered his display of almost imbecile childishness.

"But I tell you he would do anything to hurt or ruin me," he cried, rapidly losing all patience.

The sight of his evident impatience had a marked effect upon Frank. Phyllis, watching both men, saw her lover's eyes suddenly harden. His rather large mouth, so like the millionaire's, suddenly shut tight, and the movement was accompanied by a fierce setting of the jaws. A wave of

anxiety for what was coming swept over her. Then came Frank's voice, as fierce and harsh as ever she had heard in Alexander Hendrie.

"If this man Hinkling's coming means saving Mrs. Hendrie's life, and Leyburn has power to let him through in time, and refuses it, I'll kill him, Mr. Hendrie," he cried, in a deep, stern voice. "I'll choke the rotten life out of him with these two hands," he added, in a sudden frenzy, reaching out toward the other with his fists clenching, as though they were grasping the labor leader's throat.

Hendrie's eyes lit as he heard the other's words and saw the murderously inspired action. The man meant it. He recognized the fierce spirit which underlay a nature of kindliness and gentle feeling, and, curiously enough, it warmed him, as the gentler side of the man had left him untouched.

He was about to reply when quite suddenly Phyllis cried out.

"I see. I see," she said. "Frank's right, Mr. Hendrie. Leyburn has the power, and, if he will not use it, he must be made to——"

But before she could proceed further the door was unceremoniously flung open, and Angus Moraine, lean, vulture-like, hurried in.

"It's no good, Mr.—— Oh, beg pardon. I didn't just know——" He paused, as though about to withdraw at the sight of Frank and Phyllis. "Guess I'll come along later," he said. "There's a fire way out to the west. I saw it as I came along. Looks like the prairie. I'll just get around. You won't need the automobile. It'll take me quicker."

Phyllis started.

"Fire?" she demanded, in sudden alarm.

"Out west?" cried Frank, rising abruptly from his seat.

Angus nodded.

"Why, yes," he said. "Guess it's just the prairie."

Suddenly the millionaire laughed aloud.

"Prairie?" he cried. "Say, Angus, my boy, that's my crop. They've fired the crop. They're going to break me. Austin Leyburn and his scallywags. They're going to smash me by burning my crop, and then they're going to

shoot down every nigger on the place while they let my wife die in her bed for want of a surgeon's aid. Do you get that all? Do you? That's Leyburn. Austin Leyburn, who came here days ago and promised he'd smash me for things done way back on the old Yukon trail. Hey! Stop right here and listen. I've got it now, and this boy, here, and this child, too, have shown me the way. There's no train to go through, eh? That's what they've told you in Calford. A million dollars won't take one through. Well, a train's going through, and for a deal less than a million. The railroaders need Leyburn's order. Leyburn's order!" He laughed in a wild sort of sarcasm. "Well, by God, he shall give it! This boy and girl are on. It don't need any telling. You are on, my dour Scot—I know you. We'll let him burn the crop, let him shoot up the niggers, I don't care a curse. He's going to send that train through. Sit right down and I'll tell you 'bout it."

CHAPTER XVII

A RAID

Austin Leyburn was well enough satisfied. More than that, he felt he had earned these moments of satisfaction.

He had taken a big chance in rushing down in his automobile from Calford to Everton at the moment when the newly started strike of the railroad required his whole attention, and the sympathies of other forms of transport required to be brought into line. So many things might go wrong with his greater plans, and though his working staff and fellow-leaders were men of capacity, and fully able to deal with affairs, he knew that, in all emergency, his was the organizing brain, his was the final word.

But the risk had been worth while. Anything was worth while that gave him opportunity of satisfying something of his almost lifelong hatred of Alexander Hendrie. This new toy of his, this organization of agricultural labor, had assumed proportions far greater in his mind than any of his other interests, and the reason of it lay in the fact that at last, after years of waiting, it had brought him into contact with the man, Leo. Better still, Leo, the Leo he had

at last found out, was worth while. He was a great man, a man head and shoulders above all his fellows in the world's affairs, and his ultimate fall would be something worth while having brought about.

His delight was manifest as he rode along the trail in the direction of Everton. His good humor left his narrow eyes smiling his satisfied thought. His men had worked well; and he—well, he had never worked harder, or with a more satisfactory result. These men of the soil were far easier to influence than town-bred workers. It was natural—as they were. Yes, for once in his life he felt grateful to those who had served him. The men who had been sent ahead to agitate had never worked with such successful results. He would remember them, and mark them out for promotion.

Then there was young Frank Smith. He smiled more broadly down at his horse's ears. Leo's son—working for his father's downfall. It was a pretty touch, and the humor of it tickled him. Oh, Leo should know of it—later on, when the work was completed.

Frank. He wondered where he was just now. The smile died out of his eyes. He had purposely kept his meeting secret. He had had no desire that the boy should witness it. He had a perfect estimate of the youngster's prejudices and feelings which might have militated against his, Leyburn's, success had Frank listened to his urging of those drink-sodden creatures to violence. But where was he? He had received no word from the boy for nearly a week. He made a mental note to set inquiries afoot—that is, if no word were awaiting him on his return to Calford.

At that moment his horse, an old roadster, hired at the livery barn in Everton, threw up its head and snuffed at the light, southern breeze. Leyburn glanced up expectantly and turned his eyes in the direction in which his uneasy horse was staring. In an instant Frank was forgotten, and his whole attention became fixed upon what he beheld. He drew rein sharply, and the animal stood fidgeting and fretful.

Away to the southwest behind him a ruddy glow shone upon the night sky. It was the direction whence the night breeze sprang, and he knew that it was at the point where he had held his meeting. He rubbed his hands gleefully

and chuckled. While he watched the glow spread along the southern horizon, and as it spread so the stars in the sky above were obscured, and he knew that a great fog of smoke had intervened to hide them.

His horse continued to fidget, and again and again its gushing nostrils strove to expel the taint of smoke, now plainly to be noticed in the fresh air of the plains.

But the man remained absorbed. Farther and farther along the horizon lit, and now, where before only a glowing reflection had been, a sharp belt of flame showed up, revealing to his satisfied eyes the great billows of smoke rolling along and upwards, borne upon the bosom of the summer breeze.

He knew that his work was complete. He knew that those whom he had left behind to see that his desires were carried out had done so promptly and satisfactorily. He knew that now no human hand could save the miles of crop belonging to Alexander Hendrie. He knew that, by morning, a charred, black debris would be all that remained of hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of grain, and that Leo, the great Leo, would be just so much the poorer.

He gave his restive horse its head, and the eager beast plunged forward down the trail. It was thankful, desperately thankful, for the chance of getting away from the hateful, fascinating sight.

Leyburn's eyes remained turned upon the wonderful spectacle of the fiercely burning grain. The fire was sweeping onward with a terrific rush, and a dull roar reached him as it licked up the rustling heads of wheat in a parallel to the road he was traveling. Its pace was miraculous, and man and beast were soon left far behind in the race. Never had this man witnessed such a wonderful scene, and something of its awe filled his heart.

He had no misgivings, no qualms of conscience. It was his work, this wanton destruction, and he gloried in it. The weight of his hand had fallen, and he knew that Alexander Hendrie, while powerless to help himself, would understand who had directed the blow.

The fire grew with lightning rapidity, and even here on this trail, well away from the danger zone, the heat left his horse in a lather of sweat. The smoke, too, was choking,

but the discomfort of it was no discomfort to him at all, only to his horse, who had no desire for a cruel vengeance in its submissive heart.

He sped on rapidly. Soon the trail turned away northward, and the fire fell lower and lower upon the horizon, and the heated night air cooled and sweetened. But the man half regretted he was no longer in full view of the result of his mischief. Still he reveled in the thought of what Hendrie's feelings must be just now. It gave him the greatest delight to picture the millionaire standing in the shadow of his palatial home while a vast slice of his wealth was vanishing in smoke before his eyes.

An hour later he approached the bluffs which surrounded Everton. He had passed no one on the trail. As he drew near his destination he was still further astonished to find no sign of excitement stirring. He looked back. The sky was lit for miles around, yet Everton and its surroundings seemed all undisturbed. There was just a slight feeling of pique in him as he realized how little popular stir his doings had caused, and this lack of interest somehow lessened his satisfaction.

The bluff swallowed him up, and he dug his heels viciously into his horse's flanks.

The next moment he became aware of a horseman riding toward him. That was better. Everton was awake after all. Doubtless only the silence of the bluffs gave the little town its appearance of indifference to the epoch-making achievements of his genius.

The horseman rounded a bend in the trail just ahead of him. He drew up sharply as he came abreast.

"Say," the man cried, without ceremony, "guess you don't just happen to be Austin Leyburn?"

Leyburn thought quickly before replying.

"You looking for him?" he inquired evasively.

"What in hell do you s'pose I'm doin'?" retorted the other, with a sort of explosion.

"Shouting a deal," observed Leyburn calmly.

"Guess you'd shout too, if you was chased this time o' night rushin' around hunting a guy called Leyburn, when there's a hell of a big fire eatin' up that doggone skunk Hendrie's wheat."

"Fire?"

Leyburn appeared surprised.

"That's what I said. Say, you ain't deef an' blind, or what's ailing yer? You come along that way. Gee, I'd sure guess that lousy dollar king's 'bout hatin' hisself right now. It's his boys. They're on strike. More power to 'em, sez I. If I'd anything in their bizness I'd burn his house, too."

"You a farm hand?" inquired Leyburn amusedly.

"Was. I worked for Hendrie till his dirty Scotch manager fired me. Now I'm chasin' chores around the hotel, back there. Well, guess I got to find this guy 'fore I make my blankets this night. I'll get on—seein' you haven't seen him around."

But Leyburn promptly detained him.

"I'm your man," he said quietly. "What is it?"

"You're Leyburn?" The man's eyes twinkled in the darkness as he fumbled in his dirty waistcoat pocket. "I'm real glad," he exclaimed. "Guess I'll get a peek at Hendrie's bonfire after all. Here—it come over the 'phone for you an hour back. It's from Calford. The boss wrote it down so I wouldn't forget. You got to chase back to Calford right away. Something important. Boss said they wouldn't say wot, seein' it wasn't you speakin', but you wasn't to lose a minit—'cep you wanted one hell of a bust-up of trouble. Here it is." He drew out a piece of paper tightly folded.

Leyburn took the paper.

"That what this paper says?" he asked.

"Wal, not just them words, but you got to get back right away. Guess I'll get on an' see that fire now."

The choreman picked up his reins and rammed his heels into his horse's flanks.

"So long," he called out, as his horse dashed forward in the direction Leyburn had come.

Leyburn did not trouble to reply. He was already urging his horse forward so as to reach the hotel with as little delay as possible.

Trouble in Calford. He had risked it by making his visit to Everton. It was always the way. He might have known. What fool trick had they been up to in his absence? Was there ever such a pack of imbeciles? Not one fit to be

trusted for a second. He slashed his horse's sides with vicious heels in his haste to obey the summons.

The level prairie trail lay like a ribbon outstretched in front of the speeding machine, as the searchlight at the head of the car threw out its great shaft of hard, cold light.

The man at the wheel sat well forward. His eyes were straining behind his glasses, straining to discover in time those treacherous unevennesses so frequently found in the hollows of an unmade road. The speed was terrific, and even Austin Leyburn, who sat beside him, with all his confidence in his man, was sitting up, too, lending his watchful eyes to the task.

The machine purred musically in the stillness of the night. The engine was firing with perfect precision, and the occupants of the car were left free to give their whole attention to the surface of the road. It was needed, too. The danger of their speed in the darkness was great, even to the most experienced chauffeur.

Austin Leyburn had been forced to obey his summons. On arrival at the Russell Hotel he had interviewed Lionel K. Sharpe, and verified the telephone message. Sharpe had told him the same as he had written down on paper, and assured him of the urgency with which the message had been sent.

But even this had not been sufficient for the shrewd labor leader. Nothing would satisfy him but to ring up Calford himself. He was promptly afforded every facility. Nor was it until he had spent half an hour in vain ringing that he discovered that the machine had taken into its wayward, wooden head to get out of order. In consequence he was left with no alternative but to accept the message as it stood, and make the journey to Calford with all possible speed.

His mind traveled swiftly over the possibilities suggested by the message. But each and every suggestion that came to him left him dissatisfied. He could think of no probability that demanded his presence at headquarters before the morning, at his usual hour, the time his fellow-workers were aware he intended to return.

He became annoyed. The more he considered the matter

the more his annoyance grew. Yet he could not help a feeling of uneasiness, too. All his satisfaction of a short while ago had passed. It was one thing to achieve a long-cherished revenge; but, to him, it was quite another if its achievement meant the upsetting of his entire life's work. These thoughts came to him and would not be denied, in spite of his repeated reassurance that it was all impossible, and that the message must have been the result of some absurd and sudden panic on the part of some blundering fool.

He was in the midst of these reflections, and his own attention was consequently distracted from the road, when a whistling sound escaped the man beside him. It was like a sharp intake of breath, caused by sudden alarm. Leyburn turned toward him, and as he did so the car jolted under the sharp application of brakes, while behind them a stream of sparks lit their wake.

"What is it" he demanded, peering out ahead. "Gee!" he cried in alarm, an instant later. "Quick, skirt it!"

But the car jerked to a standstill in a manner that must nearly have ripped the tires off the wheels, and Leyburn found himself with his hands gripping the dashboard below the glass wind-screen, which came into sharp contact with his face.

"Gee! That was a narrow shave," cried the chauffeur, with a gasp of relief.

"What the devil——!" cried Leyburn, struggling back to his seat, while the engine roared free, vibrating the whole car violently, as if in angry protest.

But the driver had jumped to the ground, and stood contemplating a huge tangle of barbed wire spreading right across the trail, less than a dozen yards beyond the front wheels.

Leyburn climbed down and followed him. There were no bluffs, there were no fields with barbed wire fencing anywhere in sight. It was plain enough, even in the darkness, that they were surrounded on either hand by nothing but bare, open prairie. He approached the tangled mass, and his man pointed at it.

"We must clear it," he said. "It's these cursed farmers. They're so darned careless—— Say, if we'd gone headlong into that, it would have torn our running gear right out.

Look at that." He stooped and fingered the great strands of wire.

Leyburn bent down. His suspicions were fully aroused.

"Say," he cried. "This didn't get here by——"

"Hands up!"

The cry came sharply from directly behind the labor leader, and its threat was unmistakable.

Leyburn turned at the hoarse demand. The chauffeur stood up. Both found themselves looking into the muzzles of revolvers. Two masked men stood confronting them, while a third was waiting close by.

The chauffeur promptly complied with the order. He felt that he had nothing to gain by refusing. He remembered in time that he had only a few dollars in cash on him, and no valuables.

Leyburn was less quick to respond. Light had broken in upon his quick brain, and his thoughts had gone back to the telephone message.

Another sharp order brought his wandering attention back to the exigencies of the moment, and his hands were slowly raised above his head.

Then the third man became active. Without a moment's hesitation, and in absolute silence, he ran his hands down the labor leader's pockets. Then he produced a rope, and taking hold of his arms forced them to his sides, finally securing them behind his back. Once his man was completely trussed he turned his attention to the other, treating him to similar attentions.

The whole thing was the work of a few moments. Leyburn, impotently raging, was left quite helpless. So sudden and startling had been the attack, so unsuspected, that its success was complete; and even protest became impossible before the threat of his assailants' weapons.

Now more than ever he knew he had been trapped by the telephone message. But why, and by whom? Robbery? It was absurd. The money he had on him would not pay these men for their trouble and risk.

No, it was not robbery. Then he remembered Hendrie and the firing of his crop. In a moment he became anxious, and narrowly scrutinized the figures of his assailants. Two of them were large, and the third was a lean creature, tall

enough, but small beside the other two. Each man's face was completely covered by a long black mask. He could not tell even if they were bearded.

His suspicions once aroused, however, he quickly made up his mind that this was the work of his arch-enemy, and he knew that, for the time, at least, he stood at his mercy.

Suddenly a hand was laid upon his shoulder. He was turned about. Then he was thrust forward.

"Walk," commanded the man who had first spoken. The next moment he found himself moving out on to the prairie.

In the meantime the chauffeur was hustled back to the automobile. His captor secured him in the front seat, while the third man dragged the barbed wire clear of the road. Then the other took his place at the wheel, and the car rolled away.

The third man looked after it. Then he finally turned off the trail and followed Leyburn and his captor. By the time he reached them, both men were in the saddle, waiting. Two other horses stood by. He sprang into the saddle of one and led the other, and the whole party set off across the prairie.

CHAPTER XVIII

HIS BACK TO THE WALL

"Phew!"

Hendrie threw off the long cloth mask he had been wearing. It dropped into the wastepaper basket beside the desk. Angus Moraine followed his example.

In the center of the room, sitting on a high-legged armchair, his arms still bound, Austin Leyburn silently watched his captors' movements.

They were in the library at Deep Willows.

Long before their arrival Leyburn had become aware of his captors' identity. The identity of the third man, who was no longer with them, puzzled him—was still puzzling him. The journey to Deep Willows had been made with the passing of scarcely a single word. Once the captive attempted to break the silence, but a swift threat had left him no alternative.

Leyburn was no physical coward. But he knew men;

and his understanding of them left him convinced that Leo, as he preferred to think of him, was utterly reckless when goaded as he had been goaded by the total loss of his crop. Therefore he waited, watchful and alert, ready to fight the moment any reasonable opportunity offered, or to submit, according to circumstances.

The millionaire's manner had lost something of its severity. For the moment he felt he was back in the old fighting days when lawlessness had no terrors for his impulsive heart. It felt good to have his wits pitted against his old associate with all law and order thrust into the background. Besides, he knew that something far more precious than his own life was dependent upon the result of this night's work.

He switched on additional light and then moved over to the desk, against which he propped himself.

"Hot. Hot as hell, under those things, Tug, my boy," he said, while Angus unostentatiously seated himself in a chair somewhat behind the prisoner. "Still, I guess they were necessary. I wouldn't have had your man recognize us. You didn't matter. He did. You are only one. Say, he's a smart lad—your chauffeur. If he hadn't been you'd both likely have been on the way to glory now, traveling on a barbed wire. You were moving some. Still, I had to risk all that. I needed you out in the open, with no one around, and I hadn't time to worry out a better plan. You see, I wanted you—without any halo. Guess I'll have to hand your boy a wad—later. He did me a right good turn saving your neck."

Leyburn smarted under the jibing manner. He strove to twist himself into a position of ease, which his bound arms made almost impossible. He wanted to answer. He wanted to fling back some stinging retort, but prudence kept him silent.

Hendrie watched his endeavor to ease his position, and signed to Angus.

"Better loose him," he said, as he might have spoken of some dog. "He's harmless—anyway."

Angus obeyed. And Leyburn could no longer keep silence.

"Maybe he didn't do you so good a turn as you think," he cried, his voice husky with rage. "But you'll pay him

all right. You'll pay me, too, for this night's work. It was like you—a highway robber."

Angus looked from one to the other. There was some meaning in Leyburn's words he could not quite follow.

But the millionaire seemed undisturbed by them.

"Yes," Hendrie said, reaching round to the cabinet behind him and taking a cigar.

He bit the end off, and Angus noted the vicious clip of his sharp, white teeth. He lit the cigar deliberately, and eyed his prisoner through the smoke.

"Yes," he said again, "later I'll be ready to pay most anything. Just now it's you who're going to pay. Guess you ought to understand that. You've known me with my back to the wall before. I'm dangerous with my back to the wall. You likely know that. You paid before—guess you're going to pay now."

Leyburn stirred. The cold ease of this man's manner troubled him. This reference to his doings in the past—before another—had an ominous flavor. Policy kept him silent, though he was longing to shout another furious defiance at him.

"I'm generally ready to take my chances 'bout things," Hendrie went on, "but," he added with a contemptuous movement of the hand, "this isn't as big a chance as no doubt you figure it is. It don't amout to a heap taking forcible possession of a low-down labor man who's set the boys on to firing a million-dollar crop. Also incited them to murder a lot of harmless niggers."

Leyburn's eyes grew hot, but he answered in a tone that matched the other's for contempt.

"That wouldn't go in a court of law," he said. "You've got to prove it. You'd find yourself up against a proposition doing it. The strikers fired that crop because they were drunk." He laughed; but his mirth was little better than a snarl."

"Wouldn't it?" said Hendrie, removing his cigar and seriously contemplating the perfect white ash at its tip. "Maybe you're right though. Guess you know the limits you can go to. Still, you're apt to be overconfident. Guess you were that way some time back. You remember. You warned me you intended to 'smash' me. That was the word.

It's a good word to impress folks who're carried away by words. But it's too showy for me. Besides, it's a fool trick to warn folks you're going to hunt 'em. You need to do the smashing first and warn afterwards. That's my way. In your case that warning was fatal. It left me time to get busy. Oh, I got busy all right. Maybe you know I went East, just after. I s'pose you kept track of me. I went East for two reasons. One to make it so you couldn't hurt me through your labor machinery. The other to—hunt you up."

He paused and their eyes met. A quick, furtive inquiry was in Leyburn's. In Hendrie's there was simply a deadly cold light as he nodded.

"Oh, yes," he went on. "I hunted you up all right. P'r'aps you don't know it—but you ought to—my work is to study and watch the money market. It is for me to find out who're moving, who're manipulating. It's not always easy. So, to do it successfully, and to keep myself just ahead of other folks, I have a bureau of secret information that would be a credit to New York Tammany Hall. Do you follow me?"

Leyburn abruptly shifted his position.

"I don't," he denied, with unnecessary force.

Hendrie knocked his ash on to the Turkey carpet.

"I'll make it plainer. It will enlighten Angus, here, as well. When *you're* in conspiracy to play the stock market through labor strikes which *you* control, it's best not to threaten to smash one of the biggest operators in the country. If you're sensible, and finish with me as I want you to finish, these things don't matter. But if you're foolish, and headstrong, there are a heap of things may happen. One of them is the prisoners' dock for criminal conspiracy in your labor work. Not only for you, but for the other 'heads' of your movement."

Leyburn suddenly burst into a laugh. It was forced. It was so evidently forced that it drew a reluctant smile from the watchful Scot behind him, and a contemptuous smiling response from Hendrie, himself.

"Funny, isn't it?" the millionaire observed calmly. "It would be funnier still if your union members heard of it. Gee, they'd be tickled to death."

But the humor suggested by Hendrie passed his prisoner by. His laugh had died out, and his angry eyes snapped.

"You didn't bring me here to tell me this—this fool talk," he cried, striving desperately for calmness.

Hendrie relit his cigar, which had gone out.

"No I didn't, Tug, my boy," he said, glancing over the flame of the match at the man's furious face. "There are other things." He blew the light out, and placed the dead match carefully in an ash tray. "Guess you don't need me to preach sense to a man like you. Still, if I'd a grievance against a man—and," he smiled, "I allow you have reason to feel unfriendly toward me—I should just get right up on my hind legs and hand him all I knew—dead straight. I wouldn't worry with a bum organization of labor to do it. It's unwieldy, it's rarely effective. You leave me free to get out of it, to protect myself. Say, you haven't robbed me of a thing to-night. All you've done is to manure the soil, and do me a service toward next year's crop, which I doubt, when the time comes, if you'll be in a position to hurt."

He crossed over to the window and drew the curtains aside. The red glow of the still burning crop was shining in every direction. The window looked out upon a land of fire, with the house, an oasis in the center of it, cut off by wide "fire breaks," which left it beyond all danger.

"Look," he cried. "It's a pretty sight. Fire in every direction. But, from your point of view, wholly uneffective."

The curtains fell back in their place, and the millionaire returned to the desk. Leyburn had not moved. Like an obstinate child he had refused to look as invited, and Angus's grim face displayed his appreciation of the manner in which Hendrie was, in his own phraseology, "putting him through it."

"Then there's those niggers," the millionaire continued, as soon as he had taken up his position at the desk again. "You told the boys to shoot 'em up to-night." He shook his head sadly. "Quite ridiculous. Quite impossible. You should have thought more—and hated less. Angus has paid 'em off, and they're quitting right now, as fast as panic can chase 'em. You see, there's no more work here now for black or white for six months to come. All the hands are

out of a job, whether they like it or not. When they've starved till their bones are rattling they'll come back to us on their hands and knees. You've done that. It's the way you raise their wages. The way you better their lot. Pshaw! you're like the rest of 'em, only you're worse, because you're legally dishonest, too. So long as the papers are full of you, so long as your workers cheer you to the echo, and you can sign orders giving the world permission to go on moving around in space, so long as your pocketbooks are fattened by the blind ignorance of those you represent, what in hell do you care for the worker? I'm sick to death of you and your rotten kind. To do good there must be honesty in you—and there's none. You make the worker suffer weeks and weeks of misery and hardship, goading him into the belief that he is all-powerful, for some paltry betterment that does not begin to make up for what he has suffered. You never let him rest and prosper. You drive him, year after year, till, by the time he ends up his miserable life in poverty, he can reckon a large proportion of it has been spent in wilful idleness which has helped further to rob him of any adequate provision for his wife and children. It makes me sick. As long as the world lasts labor must be the under dog. You cannot lift labor if it cannot lift itself. Brute force must remain subservient to brain. With your unclean human hands you are striving to drive labor to a vain effort to overthrow one of the greatest laws of all life."

For the moment Hendrie seemed to have lost himself in the interest of his own subject, but he was abruptly brought back to the affairs in hand by the smiling sarcasm of his prisoner.

"Quite a lecture," he cried. "Say, Leo——"

But he reckoned without the loyal Scot behind him.

"Quit your gas," cried Angus, in a threatening tone.

Leyburn turned with sudden ferocity. But before he could voice his exasperation Hendrie broke in.

"Easy," he cried. "Don't raise your voice here. There's a sick woman upstairs. A woman sick to death. And it's because of her you're here now."

Leyburn looked quickly up into the big man's face. It had changed, changed utterly. All the old calm had gone. Memory, memory inspired by thoughts of the desperate

straits of the woman he loved, had left the millionaire's every nerve straining.

"Sick woman?" cried Leyburn. "What in hell have I to do with your sick women folk?"

Hendrie's eyes had become bloodshot. The Scot watched him closely and with some apprehension.

"I'll tell you," cried the millionaire, his jaws shutting tight on his cigar. "The woman who's sick is—my wife."

Leyburn burst into a derisive laugh.

"Your wife?" he cried. "Your wife? What about Audie? What about the woman you left to starve—to die out on the Yukon trail?" He glanced round at Angus to witness the effect of his challenge. "His wife," he said deliberately addressing the Scot. "He left her, deserted her with her unborn child."

There are moments in life when a man is face to face with death without being aware of it. This was such a moment. Hendrie's hand was on a loaded revolver in his coat pocket, and a mad impulse urged him to silenec that virulent, taunting tongue then and there. Fortunately Leyburn ceased speaking in time, and the impulse passed.

"We'll talk of that later," cried Hendrie, the blood still beating madly at his temples, but his words almost calm. "Meanwhile it's about *my wife* you're here. Mrs. Hendrie is sick to death upstairs for want of a surgeon's aid. The man who can save her is in Winnipeg. Your strike on the railroad keeps him from getting here in time to savc her. Do you understand? You're here to save her by giving an order to your union members, and those in authority over them, to permit a special train to bring him here. That's what you're here for, and—by God, you're going to give it."

The veins were standing out like ropes on his forehead as he uttered his final threat. Leyburn understood. But he could not resist an impulse to challenge him further.

"And if I refuse?" he demanded, with brows raised superciliously.

"But you won't," retorted Hendrie. "Oh, no, you won't, my friend." Then in a moment his eyes blazed up with that curious insane light Angus knew so well. A deep flush overspread his great face. "I told you my back was to the

wall," he cried. "I told you that. And you—you poor, miserable fool, believed it was because of your pitiful attempt to break me. I could laugh to think that you—you—Tug—the man I robbed on the Yukon trail, could ever hope to beat me when it came to measuring our strength. Never in your life. But, all unconsciously, you have hurt me; yes, you have hurt me—and you're going to undo that hurt." Slowly he withdrew his right hand from his coat pocket, and continued, pointing his words with the shining revolver his hand was gripping.

"You're going to write that order out now—here, in this room. You're going to write it so there can be no mistake. One of your men—one of your lieutenants—the man you call Frank Smith is going to take it and see that it is obeyed. He will also accompany the train. You'll write it now—this moment, do you understand? Now—here—or I'll shoot you down for the miserable cur you are."

Angus was sitting bolt up in his chair. His hard eyes were alight. He knew the mood of his employer, and even he dreaded what might follow.

But Leyburn, too, had realized something of the insane passion driving this man. Nor had he any desire to test it too far. However, he still demurred. He knew that for the second time in his life this great Leo had the best of him, and he must submit. But his submission should be full of fight.

"This man. This Frank Smith," he said, looking squarely into the millionaire's eyes. "Does he know what relation he is to you?"

"No. Do you?" Hendrie's reply bit through the silence.

Leyburn nodded. He was grinning savagely.

"Yes," he said. "I discovered it soon after I—discovered you."

Hendrie's eyes were blazing.

"Good," he said. "Then it'll help to embellish the story you'll have to tell him—after he returns from Winnipeg."

"After?" Leyburn started.

Hendrie nodded. But his revolver was still tightly clutched in his hand.

"Perhaps I have a poor estimate of human nature," he said. Anyway—of yours. I've taken all the chances with

you I intend to take. You are going to stop right here—after you've written that order."

"But—if I write this order as you want it, you can't, you've no right——"

"Right?" Hendrie laughed savagely. "Right?" he reiterated scornfully. "We've done with all question of right just now. For the moment I'm the top dog, and until you've complied with all my demands, you can put the question of right out of your mind. There's the paper and ink," he went on, moving away from the desk. "Make out that order—at once."

Leyburn made no attempt to comply. He sat there with his narrow eyes on the man standing threateningly confronting him. He was thinking—thinking rapidly. He was afraid, too. More afraid than he would have admitted. Besides, if he were detained until Frank returned—then what of Calford? What of the railroad strike? What of a thousand and one demands awaiting his attention. It was impossible. He broke into a cold sweat. Then his eyes wandered to the shining barrel of that revolver. He noted the tremendous pressure of muscle in the hand grasping it. There was a storm of passion lying behind that pressure. He raised his eyes to the greenish gray of Hendrie's. To him their expression was surely not sane.

"Write that order!"

The millionaire's revolver hand was slowly raised. Leyburn saw the movement. At the same time he became aware that Angus was moving his chair out of the direct line of fire. He was beaten, and he knew it.

"Hell take you!" he cried, rising from his seat. "Give me the paper!"

Hendrie pointed at the desk without a word. Leyburn followed the indication. Then he walked over and seated himself in the millionaire's chair.

For several minutes there was no sound in the room but the scratching of the labor leader's pen. Angus looked on, watching his employer and wondering. He was wondering what really would have happened had Leyburn refused. Somehow he felt glad he had moved out of the line of fire. Hendrie's eyes never left the figure bending over the desk.

At last Leyburn flung down the pen.

"There's the order," he cried, rising from the desk. "It's absolutely right. No one will disobey it," he declared ostentatiously. "Now I demand to be allowed to go free."

The millionaire picked up the paper, blotted it, and then carefully read it over. He was satisfied. It seemed all he could desire. He looked up and shook his head.

"You'll remain my—guest—till the surgeon arrives," he said.

Leyburn suddenly threw up his hands, and the movement was an expression of panic.

"It will take a—week!" he cried desperately.

"You'll remain my—guest—until he comes." Hendrie's voice and manner were utterly savage. "If he is too late to save her, my promise goes if—I swing for it."

CHAPTER XIX

TWO MEN

THE devastation of the wheat lands of Deep Willows was complete. The home of Alexander Hendrie itself, stood out scathless, the center of a blackened, charred waste. It was a mockery, a pitiful mockery of its recent glory. Against its somber, naked surroundings the delicate paint work of its perfect wooden structure left a vulgar, even tawdry impression of the mind. It looked as out of place as bright colors at a plumed funeral. The home farm, the outlying farms for miles around, they, too, stood as they had stood before, while all the live stock, their "feed," the machinery, had escaped the ravages of the sea of fire by reason of the well-planned "fire-breaks" which the cautious Scot kept in perfect order.

The fire had stripped the river banks, too. The beautiful wooded slopes, the pride and delight of their owner and his manager, were now mere blackened skeletons whose moldering limbs were beyond even the power of time to heal.

It was a terrible destruction, so wanton, so useless, even as an expression of human hatred. So utterly was it lacking in this respect that it became nothing short of an insult to

the Creator of all things rather than an act of vengeance of human upon human. The only real sufferers would be those whose hands had wrought the mischief, a suffering that must be surely just.

Hendrie himself did not witness daylight's revelation. Long before morning he was in Calford, accompanied by Frank, whose work had been the secret bestowal of Leyburn's chauffeur, and his automobile, until such time as the man could safely be permitted to return to the world to which he belonged. Hendrie and his helpers had committed themselves to their conspiracy in no uncertain fashion. Whatever the outcome for them they had been prepared to risk all for the life, which at least two of them valued above all else.

But the man whose watch and ward this beautiful farm had been, the man whose fortunes had for so long been bound up in it, was early enough abroad, and his sunken eyes, brooding, regretful, hating, witnessed the utter ruin of his years of labor.

Angus Moraine suffered far deeper than any words could tell. It was like a mother witnessing the destruction of an only child, for this farm, and all pertaining to it, was as his only child. He loved it with a depth of affection almost incongruous in a man so hard, so unsympathetic as he. Yet his love was so real that the sight that daylight revealed to his horror-stricken eyes well-nigh broke his heart, and set him hating as he had never hated in his life. So, as he gazed abroad, he thanked Providence that his was the charge of their captive, even though that captivity were only to last a week.

Yes, Leyburn was his prisoner—was in his sole charge. Perhaps in thus committing him Hendrie had understood something of what that charge would mean. Whether he did or not, certain it is that Leyburn, before the week was out, had reason to curse the day that had brought him once more into contact with the great Leo.

The doings of the night before, the bringing of the captive to Deep Willows, had been kept a profound secret from the household. Long before morning Leyburn had been further spirited off to the inner recesses of a remote farm building where his jailer promptly instituted a rigor of treatment

far less merciful than that of the harshest penitentiary. Then came Angus Moraine's despair at the sight of the utter destruction about him, and, from that moment, he laid himself out to the punishment of his victim, as only his peculiar mind could conceive it. For every pang he suffered he determined that the author of them should suffer double, and his manner of achieving it was inspired by the coldly cruel streak which was part of his hard nature.

True to his intentions he achieved a hatred in Leyburn for himself that scarcely ranked less than the labor leader's hatred for his arch-enemy, Leo. Angus baited his prisoner by methods of almost devilish ingenuity. He spared no pains, no trouble, and that which passed between them was for them alone. Certain it is that long before the termination of the imprisonment, the Scot's dour temper had improved, a sure sign that even from the great disaster which had befallen his wheat lands he had contrived to draw some slight satisfaction.

In the meantime the two men in Calford were engaged on a delicate mission, in spite of their possession of Leyburn's written instructions to his colleagues. Upon Frank devolved the chief work. Alexander Hendrie dared not appear in it. Frank was known to be Leyburn's lieutenant, and, as such, he was received.

But there was much formality, an exhaustive inquisition as to Leyburn, his whereabouts, the work he was engaged upon, the purpose of his order and; Frank was forced to lie as never in his life had he lied before. Money had to be spent freely in every direction. The railroad company had to be adequately reassured and indemnified. Its fears of disaster to itself had to be lulled, and, in the process, the expenditure of money was staggering. The conflicting forces at work in every direction were appalling. Among the strikers, their leaders, and then the railroad company. So much inhumanity and ignorance prevailed under the cloak of humanity that almost at any moment during the negotiations the whole project might well have fallen to the ground.

Finally, however, the last obstacle was overcome, the last difference adjusted, and the hour for departure came. Adhering to their methods of conducting the negotiations, the

final Godspeed was spoken in the privacy of Hendrie's rooms in the hotel at which he was staying.

It was brief enough, as became the existing relations between the two men.

Frank received his final instructions concerning Professor Hinkling, and stood waiting.

Hendrie paused for a moment, considering. Then he looked into the boy's serious, earnest face, with a shadowy smile in his steady eyes.

"Keep it in your mind, boy, that poor Mon is depending on you," he said. "Her life is in your hands—for the moment. Bring him back with you. Bring him back if you have to fight the whole way, and—well, I guess God'll bless you for it."

Frank nodded. Then the millionaire, after a fractional pause, crossed to the door and held it open. Frank looked into his face for one fleeting second. Then he moved toward the door. A look of indecision was in his eyes, but finally he turned deliberately, and with decision.

"Good-bye, Mr. Hendrie," he said. Then he added in a low, earnest tone. "I thought I hated you, sir, but—I don't."

The millionaire made no reply, and the boy passed out.

Nor was the latter conscious of the deepening tenderness in the older man's eyes. All he felt, all he knew, was that the last shadow of the past, of his past sufferings at this man's hands, had been swallowed up in the great bond of sympathy now existing between them. Each man was ready to lay down even his life for one poor, helpless, sick woman; each was inspired by a love that now knew no limits to its sacrifice of self.

Hendrie turned back from the door with a deep sigh. He raised his right hand and stood thoughtfully gazing at it. It was almost as if he were examining it, seeking something his conscience told him he would find upon it. He knew, too, that his thought was of something unclean. He knew, too, that however much he had longed to grip the departing boy's hand in honest affection he had no right to do so—yet.

His return to Deep Willows was almost precipitate. He wanted to spend not a moment more than was necessary

away from the roof which sheltered Monica. The chaotic condition of railroad affairs in Calford interested him not one whit now. He cared nothing for the rights or wrongs of the battle raging between labor and capital. The weary women and hungry children of the strikers, for all he cared could die in the ditches their husbands had dug for them.

As for the employers, let them fight their battles out as best they could. It mattered not at all if the country's entire trade were left at a standstill, nor was it of consequence what anarchy reigned. The stock markets might collapse, and shares might fall beyond redemption. His wealth counted for nothing in the stress of his feelings. Just one thing counted; one poor, flickering, suffering life.

So he rushed headlong back to Deep Willows to pass the time of waiting with what patience he could. Humanly speaking, he had played his last card for the saving of that one life, so there was nothing left for him but to pace the floors of his luxurious home hoping and fearing, now threatening to himself the life of the man who had made the chances of timely help so remote, now praying to Almighty God, as never in his life he had prayed before, to spare him the life he loved.

He had reached the one terrific moment in his life when he realized that the world, in which his heart and mind had been so long wrapped, meant nothing. He was down to the bare skeleton of human nature when primal passions alone counted. He knew that he had shed for ever the coat of civilization. It had always fitted him ill. Now the natural love of man for woman, male for female, in its simplest form, dominated his whole being. And with it came all those savage instincts with which the natural world seeks to protect its own.

The destruction of his wheat lands passed him by. He did not see that blackened world as his loyal servant Angus saw it. He had neither patience nor inclination to listen to lamentations, just as he had no lamentation to make over it for himself.

His attitude reflected itself in his surroundings. The house remained silent as the grave. Angus avoided him, and devoted all his attention to his prisoner. The nurses and the doctor devoted themselves to the last ounce of their

strength to their patient; and the servants went about their duties with hushed voices, which left the great house with the atmosphere of a sepulcher.

Hendrie rarely left his library. Hour after hour he spent in desperate solitude. His pretence was work, but he did none. And Phyllis alone dared to approach him.

From her he drew some comfort. Her wonderful tact, and even affection, showed her the way to bring him a measure of that mental ease he so desperately needed. Only once during that terrible week of waiting did she make a mistake. She knew she had made it the moment the words had passed her lips, and it became a lesson she knew she would never need again.

It was on the fourth day of Frank's absence. She was beginning to catch something of the infection of Hendrie's restless unease. Doubt of the success of Frank's mission was creeping through her armor of optimism. She was troubled, and so her moment of weakness came.

"I—I wonder if he'll succeed. I wonder—if he'll be in time," she said.

Then in a moment she caught her breath at the sudden and awful expression of the man's eyes. They blazed up with a wild, insane light. He broke into a loud, harsh laugh.

"If he doesn't, you'll see me at the gallows, girl," he cried.

Phyllis had cried out in protest. Then, in something like panic, she rushed from the room.

That night she was haunted by dreams so hideous that long before daylight she had left her bed, and joined the night nurse.

Once more her fear got the better of her, but here she was met by the practical trained mind of a woman who was devoted to her work.

"If Hinkling doesn't get here to-morrow, or the next day —well, poor soul, she's in the hands of some one who knows best. Doctor Fraser gave too big a margin, I think. Still we must hope for the best. Poor soul, she knows nothing—so she can't be suffering. I see Mr. Hendrie's light is still burning in the library. He'll be in the doctor's hands if Hinkling doesn't get here—in time."

Phyllis agreed. She knew it, too. She knew the desperate

condition of the man's mind, and her knowledge told her that the balance was wavering.

The fifth day dawned. Still there was no news. But none could reach them. The day after Hendrie's return from Calford the telegraph wires had been cut, and, since then, all communication had been left intermittent. The wires were repaired, and, within a few hours, cut again. And so it had gone on. The automobile had been waiting in Calford for two days now, and all knew that the only indication of the success of Frank's mission would be the return of the vehicle with its precious freight.

Thus on this day all eyes and thoughts turned upon the trail through the blackened wheat fields.

* * * * * * * * * *

It was noon. Phyllis and the millionaire were standing at the entrance porch. The sun was beating down upon their bare heads all unnoticed, all uncared. The eyes of the man never left the sweep of the trail where it rounded the skeleton woods which lined the river bank. The girl had wearied of the straining, and now watched her companion.

In her heart was a great pity for him. His eyes were no longer the steady eyes she knew so well. They were bloodshot and sunken. The veins at his temples, and of his neck, were standing out like ropes. It seemed to her imagination that all his great bodily strength was concentrated at the breaking point. Painful as was her own anxiety, it was as nothing beside the fear his attitude inspired her with. If Frank failed?—but she dared not think of it.

Suddenly she started. Just for one moment a look of dreadful doubt looked out of her eyes, now abruptly turned upon the trail again. Had her prairie-trained ears deceived her, or——? She dared not glance again in Hendrie's direction until she was sure. She listened. Then a wild excitement lit her face. She moved. She reached out. One hand suddenly gripped the arm of the man beside her. He made a movement as though to free himself, but her nervous clutch only tightened.

"Listen!" she cried. Then in a moment: "Oh, if he's succeeded. Oh, if he's only got him with him!"

"Silence, child!"

The man's harsh voice rang out, and Phyllis, even in her excitement, quailed at the tone.

Now, side by side, with eyes and ears straining, the girl still clinging to the man's arm, they stood waiting.

That familiar purr. Soft, soft, a low, deep note thrilling with hope for the watchers. But it was far away, so far that the man, whose ears were less well trained, could only just hear it.

To Phyllis it was distinct now, and growing in volume with each passing moment. Oh, that precious note. What music. No such perfect music could ever have fallen on straining ears. Its gentle softness suggested but one thing to the girl. It was the hope of life. She felt that no such warmth, no such modulation could have been in that which was the herald of disaster.

The man's imagination was less sensitive. His usually firm mouth was twitching. There was water in his eyes, but it was not tears, nor was it the result of excitement. It was the strain he was putting forth to catch the first sight of the vehicle, and count its passengers as it came.

He shivered once. The girl felt the shiver, and she, too, shook with excitement. She was leaning forward.

At last she could stand it no longer. She broke from her companion, and flew down the trail as fast as her active young limbs could carry her. She must be the first to convey the good news to the breaking heart of the man who remained standing, like one paralyzed, by the porch of his splendid home.

On she ran, on and on, till she came to the bend where the river turned away, and the open trail went straight on, and the bluffs of Everton lay in full view.

Here she halted and gazed out. For some moments she stood watching, watching. Then, at last, she turned and began to run back, waving her hands in a frenzy of ecstasy as she came.

In a few moments she was within hailing distance of the man, and she halted.

"Four of them!" she gasped frantically. "Four of them in the car! Frank's brought him! Frank's brought him!"

CHAPTER XX

THE STORY OF LEO

It was evening. The afterglow of sunset still shed its golden radiance upon a blackened world, striving vainly to burnish with its gentle luster the depressing aspect of charred fields. The cool August breezes, usually so fresh and sweet at sundown, were tainted, scarcely unpleasantly, with the reek of dead fire.

Two figures, apparently absorbed in themselves, were pacing slowly the broad trail which fronted Deep Willows. They were talking, talking earnestly of those things which concerned their lives, while their anxious hearts were waiting with almost sickening dread, for the moment when a summons should reach them, that they might learn the verdict of hope or disaster which Providence had in store for them.

They knew, these two, these boy and girl lovers, that the life of the one they had learned to love so dearly was hovering in the balance. They knew that the great surgeon, who had journeyed so far, and under such strenuous conditions, was waging the human side of a great battle.

Was he once more to be victorious over Death, or would that ruthless specter at last defy him? The man was accounted infallible by a thankful world. He had come to the rescue fully prepared for a great fight. He had brought not only his own dresser, but also his own anesthetist, while two competent nurses and another medical man were on the premises. So these two hoped, while their hearts were yet plunged in a perfect maelstrom of fears.

They were striving with all their might to pass the hours of waiting. Professor Hinkling had been with his patient from the moment of his arrival soon after noon. He was still with her now, when the great August sun had set amid its glory of fiery cloud.

Phyllis halted in her walk. Quite abruptly she raised a pair of earnest, admiring eyes to her lover's face. In their depths lay all that which can raise a man to a perfect para-

dise of joy and hope. Never had her woman's attraction been more evident to young Frank than at that moment. Never in his life had he realized more fully than at this moment all he had so recently striven to crush out of his life and deny himself for ever.

"Say, Frank, dear," she cried ardently. "The more I think, why, the more I just love to feel you—you are *my* Frank, and it was you, and you only, could have brought Professor Hinkling through here. Say, you must have been well-nigh crazy with the worry—and—and anxiety. Oh, if you'd only known how we, Mr. Hendrie and I, felt standing right here to-day waiting—waiting with scarcely a reason to hope you'd make Deep Willows in time. D'you know, Mr. Hendrie was well-nigh clean crazed—sure?" She shuddered. "I never saw a crazy man before, but he was crazy then. I watched him. I was scared—scared to death."

Frank looked out over at the great house. Suddenly he breathed a deep sigh.

"I'm glad, Phyl," he said presently. "I'm glad—I got here in time. I'm glad, not only for poor Mon, but for—him." He looked down into the girl's eyes, and a half smile crept into his own. "It's all so queer," he went on. "I—I ought to hate that man. Yes, I ought. And I just feel like a sort of soft worm for not doing so. That's a fact, Phyl. I don't hate him. I—I like him. Do you know I seem to have seen into him, right deep down into his heart, and it's—a queer place. But I've seen something there that appeals to me. It appeals to me so big that I—simply can't hate him. It's his big manhood. He's full to the brim of something that I've never understood before. Something I'm just beginning to understand. And, d'you know, I don't believe there's nearly so much of it going around as folks pretend to believe. Do you know, Phyl, I believe if that man were dying to-morrow he'd just get right hold of Death, and—and he'd try to choke the life out of him before he'd give in."

Phyllis nodded her head wisely.

"You're right, dear," she cried impulsively. "Can you wonder he's where he is? Can you wonder he's right on top of the things other folks are shouting for, but haven't the strength, or grit to—to just grab hold of for themselves?

You're feeling just like I do about him. Guess he's so big in spirit as well as body. That's why he's on top. It's—it's always the way."

"Yes," Frank admitted, "that's how you've always said—and I think—now—you're right. I didn't always think so—but I do now."

Phyllis turned away. She was gazing across at the house, and a deep look of enthusiasm and hope was shining in her eyes.

"Do you know, Frank," she said, after a pause. "I sort of feel our Mon will win out—now. No, I'm not just thinking of Professor Hinkling. I'm thinking of Mr. Hendrie. I sort of feel he's got to win out in—everything. His whole mind and heart's on Monica's recovery, and—and I believe they're too big and strong for Fate to break him. Oh, I'm foolish, I know. I'm talking like a crazy girl, but I just can't help it. I believe he's too strong even—for Fate."

Frank, too, was gazing across at the house. A curious look had crept into his eyes. They were stern, stern and cold, and his jaws had shut tight.

Phyllis, glancing up at him, wondered. It was the first time in her life she had seen such a look in her lover's eyes. Never, even in those dark days when he had first left prison, had she seen such a look in him. And yet it was quite familiar. It was a look she knew quite well.

She started, and an irresistible impulse stirred her.

"Frank! Oh, Frank!" she cried. "If you could only see yourself. Tell me, dear. What are you thinking?"

"Thinking?"

The look had passed. The man's eyes were now gently smiling down into the girl's eager face.

"I was thinking of you, Phyl," he said tenderly. "I was thinking of you in Mon's place, and of myself in Hendrie's. I was thinking of what I should do. Of how I should feel. I was thinking that I, too, should want to take Fate in my two hands and compel it to do my will."

His face was flushing with boyish shame at the apparent boastfulness of his words, but he had spoken the truth.

But Phyllis saw nothing of the braggart in his words.

"I knew it, I knew it," she cried, her eyes shining with love and admiration. "Your face was the face of Alexander

Hendrie just now. I have seen that look in his, not once, but a hundred times, and—then it was in yours. Oh, Frank, I am so glad, so—so glad you felt like that. I long to think and feel that now the old miserable past is over and done with, that you, too, will take life in your two strong hands, and—and fight out the big battle the Almighty has set for men. I want no man who must have others to fight for him; I want no man who will cry out weakly at every blow in the face; I want no man who will yield beneath the flail of Fate. I want the man of big courage, the man of fight. He must have the muscles of a giant, and the heart of a lion. That man I will set up on my little altar, and so long as I live I will go down on my knees and thank God for His goodness in giving him to me."

Frank had no words in which to answer. A great passion was sweeping through his veins and held him silent. Of a sudden his arms reached out and caught the girl's slim body in their powerful embrace, and, regardless that they were in full view of the house, he crushed her to his bosom, and kissed her passionately.

But Phyllis was more mindful of those things, and swiftly released herself with a little cry.

"Frank!" she protested. "Frank!"

But Frank remained smilingly unrepentant.

"I don't care," he cried. "I don't care if the whole——"

He broke off with a scared look in the midst of his smile. Phyllis was pointing across at the house. The glass entrance doors had just swung to, and a man-servant was rapidly coming toward them.

"It's—it's about—Monica!" Phyllis exclaimed, in a sudden panic.

The man addressed himself to Frank.

"Mr. Hendrie would like to see you at once, sir. He's in the library now—waiting."

Frank looked into the man's inscrutable face in anxious inquiry.

"Is there—has there been any word of—Mrs. Hendrie—yet?" he questioned sharply.

The man's sigh was in perfect order with his training.

"I think not—yet, sir."

Frank sighed, too. His relief was lest the news should have been bad. His eyes sought Phyllis's.

Then he turned again to the man.

"You said—at once?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Hendrie was emphatic on the point."

Phyllis looked up into her lover's face.

"You best hurry, Frank."

"Yes."

Frank hurried away, leaving the man to return to the house at his leisure.

Daylight was rapidly dying. Already the remoter corners of the library were lost in growing shadows. Outside the rosy sunset had chilled to a pale yellow, above which a faint twinkle of stars was already visible.

Hendrie was sitting astride a chair. Its back was turned, and his folded arms were resting upon it. His great, square chin was thrust forward supported upon them.

His eyes were gloomy, and coldly brooding as they surveyed the other two occupants of the room. Austin Leyburn was seated with his back to the window, and his face was lost in the shadow. A few yards away from his charge sat Angus Moraine. His watchful eyes, full of a hatred he made no attempt to conceal, were steadily fixed upon the other's shadowed features.

A painful, straining silence reigned in the room. There was nothing more to be said between these three until the arrival of the man whom Hendrie had dispatched a servant in search of.

Presently the door opened. Hendrie half turned his head. Leyburn's eyes lifted in the direction. Only Angus remained indifferent to the arrival. He knew that his reign in charge of his prisoner was over, and the thought was as gall and wormwood to him.

Frank glanced in turn at the three figures. Then he approached his host.

"You wished to see me, Mr. Hendrie."

The millionaire raised his head and nodded.

"Yes, boy," he said, and Leyburn's eyes suddenly lit with a venom that seemed to fit with their narrow setting.

Now Hendrie seemed in no hurry to proceed. He turned

about leisurely, and reached over to his cigar cabinet. He selected a cigar with some care, smelled it, and rolled it lightly between finger and thumb. Then he pushed the cabinet along the desk in Frank's direction.

"Smoke?" he said, and bit off the end of his own cigar.

Frank shook his head.

"I'd rather smoke my pipe," he said simply.

Hendrie's eyes became less cold. He nodded.

"Sit—anyway," he said, in his brief, almost brusque fashion.

Frank obeyed, and the other lit his cigar.

When it was burning satisfactorily, he turned thoughtful eyes on Frank, who was in the act of lighting his pipe.

"Say," he began, evidently thinking hard, "Hinkling's sent word he'll be along in a while. Couldn't just say how long. Seems to me there's got to be some talk in this room —before he comes. This feller here, Austin Leyburn, or Tug, as I've always known him, is full to the brim with stuff he's crazy to hand out to the—general public. It's mostly about me. You see, we knew each other well, some twenty years ago. He sort of thinks he knows a heap about me I'd hate to hand on to anybody else, specially you—and Mrs. Hendrie. I've been trying to convince him this while back I'm just yearning for you both to hear all he's got to tell, but I want to be around so I know he tells it right. You see, it's important he tells it right. Guess my being around don't seem to suit him, and he's kicking. Says he'll tell it when he wants, and in his own way. Not as I want, and at my time. He says he's going to raise trouble all around for us—when he gets away. I've told him he can do what in hell he likes—when he gets away. Meanwhile, you are going to hear all he wants you to hear right now. If he won't tell you in front of me as I want him to, then I'll tell it you in front of him as he don't want me to. If I hide anything or forget anything, or tell it wrong, it's up to him to correct me, same as I should correct him. Whether he likes it or not, that story's going to be told right here and now.

There was no mistaking Alexander Hendrie's manner. Frank knew that a crisis in the man's life had arrived, perhaps a crisis in the lives of all those present. He made no

attempt to reply. He knew that the millionaire's words were the preliminary to a skirmish in which he had no part beyond that of an onlooker.

Hendrie turned to Leyburn.

"You get me?" he demanded. "You can choose to tell—or not. I don't care a curse which you do."

Leyburn suddenly cleared his throat. He sat forward in his chair and even in the failing light it was plain—the furious flashing of his eyes. Angus lost no detail of any purpose, other than to talk, in his prisoner. He sat absolutely alert.

"Yes," Leyburn suddenly cried out. "I'll tell the story to this—this cur of a boy of yours, damn you." Then he flung out an arm, pointing at the man astride his chair, smoking in his steady, unruffled fashion. "See that man," he cried, with added fury, addressing himself to Frank. "See that low-down thief? See him, a cur who can even rob the dead? That's your father!"

It was a terrible moment. It was a moment so painful that no added word could have intensified its drama.

Nor was any word forthcoming. Hendrie smoked on. His face was calm, his balance of restraint was quite undisturbed before the hideous accusation.

One swift glance of Frank's blue eyes shot in his father's direction, but, otherwise, he, too, continued to smoke his pipe without a sign. He knew it was not for him to speak —yet. Angus silently gritted his teeth. His astonishment could not be doubted. Leyburn alone seemed to be affected. He had lashed himself to a super-heat by his own words.

"Say," he cried, still addressing himself to Frank. "You young skunk, I can thank you for all this—this that's happened here. I find you, a jail-bird, coming straight from the penitentiary, and I take you, make a man of you, and this—this is the way you repay me. But I might have known it would be. If ever there was a son of a rotten father, you are he. The three of you've got me here. You reckon I'm in your power. Guess none of you'd stop at murder, if it suited you. I tell you unless you do it, and do it quick, there's a long road ahead of us all, and we'll travel it together, and I'll fight you every inch of the way."

Hendrie removed his cigar from between his lips.

"The boy's waiting for your yarn. The other'll keep for —later."

"Yes, you're right, Leo. Oh, you're right," Leyburn retorted passionately. "It'll keep till later. Meanwhile I'll get on with the story." He turned again to Frank. "You're this man's bastard. You understand—his bastard. Twenty years ago we were on the Yukon together——"

"Not together. We were both there," corrected Hendrie.

"Yes, we were both there. You were living with your paramour—the woman Audie—this fellow's mother. I was with my partner, Charlie. He was sick to death. We'd got a big wad of gold from the creek, and because Charlie was sick——"

"And you'd got enough gold to suit your purposes," put in Hendrie quietly.

"We decided to return to civilization," Leyburn went on, ignoring the interruption. "I hoped to get him cured."

"So you made him face the winter trail." Hendrie's addition was made quite without passion.

"We set out down country with our dogs, and all our goods, and gold, and got held up by a blizzard. We were camped in a bluff. Charlie could not stand the weather. He got so weak we couldn't travel. Then before we struck camp he died. I didn't know he was dead, and I had gone to gather firewood. Meanwhile, this man and your mother made up their minds to return to civilization. He had a big wad of gold. You were to be born before winter was out, and your mother was scared to have you born up there. So she made this man bring her down. She reckoned he was honest, and would marry her. She reckoned like that because she was a woman," he added, with burning contempt.

He waited for Hendrie's comment, which came promptly.

"She reckoned that way because she knew it was my purpose," he said coldly.

"But you didn't marry her, did you?" Leyburn cried tauntingly.

"I didn't marry her because she was dead when I finally found her whereabouts."

"But she did not die till after you deserted her" cried Leyburn, with venomous triumph.

"Best go straight on with the story. You want the boy

to know it all—not in pieces." Hendrie went on smoking.

Leyburn turned to Frank again.

"And it's a pretty story," he assured him. "Listen. A week after we started down the trail these two followed us with a scout. They, too, got caught in the blizzard. They got caught in the open. They were high up in the hills. An accident happened. They lost their gold, dropped with a lot of their baggage over a precipice. This man got mad. He loved gold. He cared for nothing else. Your mother was nothing beside it. She was just a burden. Finally they made camp a few miles from us. After a while this man saw our smoke in the distance. He stole out on the excuse of fetching wood. He tramped to our camp. He came there when I was away for wood and Charlie had just died. Finding Charlie dead, and no one about, he stole our gold, our dogs and sled, our provisions and blankets, and hit the trail south, leaving your mother with the scout, and me to walk back to their camp or starve. That's the man who is your father. That's the man you've gone over to, and sacrificed your pledges to humanity for. Do you understand what you've done? Do you? You've helped this criminal, this skunk of a man who dishonored your mother, and left her and her unborn child on the long winter trail to die, this thief, this ghoul who could rob the dead, and renounced your most sacred pledges. By God, you are your father's son!"

The scorn and hatred the man flung into his final charge was far, far beyond the power of words.

He looked for its effect, waiting for Frank to take up his challenge. But he remained disappointed.

"Well?" he urged, with gathering fury.

Still there was no answer in the darkened room.

But though he remained silent Frank's heart was beating hard. A strange excitement was plunging wildly through his veins. He felt that he wanted to reach out his strong young hands and do hurt. He felt at that moment, and during the moments he was hearkening to the venomous story, aggravated by every hateful inflection that could goad, that relief could only come in violence. And his desire was to silence that hateful voice, and choke the story it was telling back into the throat of the man telling it. It did

not hurt him to hear these things of his own father because he was his father. They hurt him because they were on the tongue of this man, who, from the bottom of his heart, he had learned so to despise and hate.

Alexander Hendrie shot a sidelong glance into the boy's face. It was a furtive glance, watchful and anxious. Then his eyes returned to their dark brooding.

A moment later, as Frank made no response to the man's challenge, Hendrie removed the cigar from his mouth.

"You stuck nearer the truth than I expected you would. Maybe you knew it would be useless to do otherwise, seeing I'm here to put you right," he said, in his deep, unruffled tones. "Now——"

He broke off, and glanced quickly at the door as a sharp knock made itself heard. Suddenly he held up his hand, as though to enjoin silence, and, in a moment, his eyes lit with a mingling of wild hope and abject fear.

The door opened and, silhouetted against the brilliantly lit hall beyond, stood the slight figure of an elderly man with iron gray hair.

Hendrie sprang to his feet and pressed the switch of the electric light. Then he turned and faced Professor Hinkling as the surgeon advanced into the room.

The little man came straight up to him with his hand outstretched. His clean-cut features were smiling, but he looked tired and nervous.

"I think," he said deliberately, "we have turned the corner, Mr. Hendrie. I have every reason to believe Mrs. Hendrie will recover. The operation has been quite successful. I shall remain with Dr. Fraser to watch the case for a few days, but I have no fears of ultimate recovery. We were only just in time. Another day." He held up his hands to signify disaster, and the millionaire understood. "My best congratulations, my dear sir. She should be about again in less than a month."

The door closed on the retreating figure of the great surgeon. For a moment Hendrie stood looking after him. Then he abruptly turned and flung the end of his cigar into the cuspidor beside his desk. Then he turned again, and his eyes flashed round upon the three men who had remained

perfectly silent during the surgeon's brief visit. They were different eyes now which finally settled upon the man who had so recently heaped accusation and insult upon his head. They were full of that great fighting spirit which they all knew so well.

He strode up to Austin Leyburn, who sat watching him speculatively, who was waiting for whatever development was yet to come.

"Get up!" he cried, with a deep, underlying ferocity in his voice and manner. "Get right up on to your hind legs. You heard what he said? You heard?" He drew his right hand from his coat pocket and produced a revolver. "If his verdict had been otherwise you would never have left this room. Every chamber of this gun is loaded, and each bullet would have found its way into your rotten body. As it is, you can go. You are free. Your car, and your man, will meet you in Everton. Take my advice and get away from this neighborhood without delay. When you are away remember this. You can take what action you like for what has happened here. I don't care a curse. But I'll warn you right here and now, that you have committed criminal conspiracy in playing the stock market, and when I give the word, the machinery for prosecution will be set moving against you. Further, I'd warn you that if one word of the story you've told here to-night reaches the world outside, that word will be given, and you'll pay as you never yet guessed you'd ever pay for the luxury of a private revenge. You get me? Now go! Go quick!"

Austin Leyburn was on his feet. The two men stood eye to eye. With all his faults, the difference between them left the balance absurdly in the millionaire's favor.

"Yes, I'll go. And I'll remember," cried Leyburn fiercely. "You can shout now, but I'll remember everything. You won't have to set that machinery in motion, but when the time comes—and I'll be looking for that time all my life—you'll find I have remembered everything, both for you and —your bastard son.

As his last words leaped from between his clenched teeth he moved swiftly across to the door. Hendrie shot a quick glance at Angus, and the watchful Scot promptly followed him out.

"It's a pretty story, Frank."

Hendrie's lips were smiling, but his eyes were half anxious, half questioning.

"Guess it hasn't gained niceness from that feller," he went on. "No," he added thoughtfully. "Nothing ever gained in niceness from those lips. Tug never had pleasant ways. Still, there it is—and——" In spite of himself his eyes were wholly anxious now—"it's true, when you clean his tone off it."

Frank rose from his chair and moved away across the room. His movement seemed objectless, yet his father understood. He knew that a great conflict was going on within that silent heart, and he wondered.

But Leyburn's venomous manner of telling his, Hendrie's, story had satisfied the millionaire. He preferred that his son should know it from its worst possible aspect. That was why he had forced it from the labor man's lips. He desired no smoothing over of the roughnesses of his past character. Certainly not for his own son's benefit. He was determined that this boy should sit in judgment upon him with his eyes wide open to all his shortcomings. He wanted him to know his father as he was.

"I wanted him to tell Monica, too," Hendrie went on, after a pause. "But she's not fit to hear it—yet. Now I'll have to tell her myself. I shan't cover things up, anyway. There's just one thing I want to add. It's right I should add it. Leyburn didn't know it." He smiled. "Guess no one knew it but me. I wanted the truth from him, so we'll have it all. I want to tell you, after your mother got down to civilization I spent most of Tug's gold trying to find her—to marry her. It took me weeks and weeks. Then I found she was dead, and you—I had lost you, too."

Frank turned round, and there was thankfulness and no condemnation in the eyes that looked into his father's across the room. Instantly Hendrie's face became set.

"Say," he cried quickly, "don't think I'm squealing. Don't think I'm shuffling. These are just facts, same as the others. Get a grip on things, boy. I'm wholly unrepentant for the things I've done. Especially for—helping myself to Tug's gold. I don't go back on anything I do. These things were, and I—stand for them. There's just one other thing

I'd like you to know. I didn't know you were my son till I set about getting you released from the penitentiary. I learned that from Monica, when she told me about you. I didn't tell her of my discovery—again this is the truth—because I was scared to lose her love. You see, boy, there are some things make cowards of us in spite of ourselves. I told you that before.

"That's pretty well all. Maybe there's things you'd like to know later, when you aren't feeling so hot about this. Well, I'll be glad to tell you when you want to hear them. I'm your father, boy, and Monica is your stepmother. This is your home, same as any other place I own. You've just to open your lips and say the word, and your share of all I have is waiting for you—everything I have or—am. You get that? It's all up to you. You're just as free as you were before. Your own decision goes with me. I just want you to get me clearly. I want you to understand all that's in my head. You are my son, and I'm proud and pleased about it. But—I bend the knee to no man—not even to you—my son."

The man's curious dignity, his crude truth, and deliberate honesty of purpose were superlative. Frank was looking upon the man as he was, shorn of everything that could hide, in however slight a degree, the rugged character that was his, and he knew it.

This was the father whose violent youthful passions had brought him into the world. This was the father who had given him the breath of life which had borne him upon its stormy bosom. This unrepentant sinner. This strong man among strong men. This human creature so ready to err, yet so full of human nature, was his father.

The knowledge somehow left him no sense of outrage. He had neither resentment nor dislike. Only, in the back of his simple mind, was a lurking admiration for one who had the courage to talk as he had just talked, to do as he had just done.

He drew a step nearer.

"Father," he said. Then he paused. After a moment he repeated the word. "Father—it sounds queer to call you 'father,' doesn't it?"

The millionaire nodded. His eyes were smiling.

"Your ways may not be my ways," he went on. "I don't know. Anyway, I fancy you just see things your own way, and I mine. All that man said left me cold—except one thing. He said you—deserted my mother. You've cleared that up—and I'm glad. I'd sooner believe the truth from you than from him. But I seem to have heard such a heap. I seem to have lived through years this past week. I can't just get that full grip you spoke of. Maybe I will after a while. Still—there's a thing standing right out in my mind, and—and I'm glad. Our Mon is going to get through. God's been pretty good to us in that. She's going to live for us both. Say, we had to fight hard—and it's good to fight—after all. Since I've tasted what fighting means I seem to understand some of your life, seem to understand something of you. I'm glad we were to—gether in this. I think I'll get out, and—just walk around. I—yes, I want to—think."

The millionaire remained where he was. He made no movement. His eyes were on his son's face. He saw its color come and go in the brilliant light of the room. His halting speech told him far more than his words. He knew, deep down in his heart, that all he desired, all he longed for, was to be fulfilled.

He knew that in the midst of the threatening disaster that had so long hung over him, when all the world, and the powers of Fate had seemed to be working against him, not only was the woman he loved to be restored to him, but he was to find and recover his—son.

He nodded kindly.

"Yes, boy. I kind of know how you're feeling. Just get around, and—sort things out," he said. "When you've done, just round-up your Phyllis and tell her the things you've heard. I'd like you to. After that, if you've the notion, you can come right back to me."

Frank drew another step nearer. His father waited.

"Yes—father. I—think I will."

There was doubt and hesitation in the boy's words and movements. Hendrie remained quite still. Suddenly Frank turned away and walked toward the door. Half-way across the room he paused again irresolutely. He glanced back. The smiling eyes of his father caught his.

In a moment his indecision passed, and he strode back quickly with long, firm strides.

As he drew near, his great right hand was thrust out.

"Won't—won't you shake hands, father?" he cried.

In an instant his hand was caught in a crushing grip.

"Why, yes, lad," cried Hendrie, a great light shining in his eyes. "Say, this is just the greatest moment in my life."

CHAPTER XXI

HENDRIE'S WAY

In spite of Professor Hinkling's best assurance, a month of weary nursing and watching followed before Monica's recovery became assured. The operation was absolutely successful, but the patient herself obstinately refused to respond to the skill that sought her complete recovery. It almost seemed as though her recuperative powers had been completely destroyed, for she lingered close to the border which she had so nearly crossed, and Nature, generally so accommodating, utterly refused to carry her away from it.

Thus it was that Professor Hinkling stayed on and on at Deep Willows, puzzled and anxious. He sacrificed his great practice to that one flickering life. He was even better than his word, for he rarely ever left the house, and remained in constant attendance.

Alexander Hendrie, a prey to every misgiving which his love could inspire, watched these things with thankfulness and gratitude to the man who could so generously bestow his great skill. He was glad. Though he knew his debt to this man was beyond the reach of mere wealth he was glad that it was within his power to make a princely effort to repay.

Frank and Phyllis, too, found themselves well-nigh despairing. Whenever Phyllis could drag herself from the vicinity of the sick room, which no one but nurses and doctors were permitted to enter, she spent her time at her lover's side. Together they shared this weary trouble, as

they shared all things, buoying each other with words of hope and confidence which had no stable foundations in their minds. In Hendrie's presence they avoided the subject of Monica's health altogether. It was enough for them to witness his brooding eyes, with their gloomy, stormy look, which was rarely absent from them now.

The reaction from his moment of buoyant hope, when he had dismissed Austin Leyburn, was painful to all who observed it. The man's heart was well-nigh breaking, and a great dread filled his stormy brain. He could not rest. Work—work was the only thing, and he set himself a pace which human machinery could never hope to keep up. He avoided everybody except Angus, and these two spent every moment of their time in the repairing of the damage done by the strikers to the farm.

They were full enough weeks for everybody. Events were happening in almost every direction, the influence of which was felt throughout the whole farming world.

The strike of farm hands had fallen utterly flat since Leyburn had departed from Deep Willows, and the strikers had discovered that harvesting was going on in every direction without their aid. Instead of the employers being brought to their knees as promised, they, the strikers at Deep Willows, as a result of their own mischief, found themselves without the prospect of work, and a winter yet to face. When they attempted to gain employment on other farms, they found themselves not required. Their plight was bad, and, in very little time, they were glad enough to approach Deep Willows, as Hendrie had prophesied, pretty well on their knees.

Nor did they come in vain. In less than a week a hundred plows, steam and horse, were at work burying the last signs of recent destruction. But whatever Hendrie's feelings, whatever his attitude toward these misguided creatures, Angus Moraine's was unmistakable. He was a born martinet, nor could he forget their wanton destruction of his beloved farm.

Then, too, within two weeks of Leyburn's release, a further lightening of the labor horizon came. The significance of it was lost to the general public. Quite suddenly the railroad strike came to an end. The world was told that a compro-

mise had been effected between the men and the company. Perhaps, too, the men were told this by their leaders.

Hendrie had his own ideas upon the subject, and Angus Moraine shared them.

"There's only one thing for the gopher when the watch-dogs get loose, Angus," the millionaire said, when he received the confirmation of the rumor. "They need to hunt their holes—quick."

Angus agreed, but his eyes only half smiled.

"Sure," he said.

"Leyburn's a pretty wise guy," Hendrie went on thoughtfully. "Guess the bottom's dropped right out of his play. It'll take him a while patching it. But he'll be on to a fresh mischief later, and we'll need to keep a skinned eye. But I guess it won't be playing stocks through labor strikes. Say, he'll quit labor—after a while."

How true was Alexander Hendrie's surmise time soon showed. Austin Leyburn did resign from his official capacity in labor circles. And within a year he suddenly reappeared in the financial world, which brought him under closer observation by the wheat operator.

These events came, passed, and soon were relegated to the mere memory of a stormy period, scarcely pleasant to dwell upon. In the meantime Monica's retarded recovery occupied every mind at Deep Willows. It was so wholly inexplicable.

One day, toward the end of the third week, Professor Hinkling, who had taken a great fancy to Phyllis, opened his heart to her upon the subject.

It was one morning. Phyllis was on the landing not far from the door of the sick room. She was waiting, as was her custom, for the surgeon's report. He had been with his patient longer than usual and the girl was worried, and more than usually depressed. All sorts of fancies had taken hold of her imagination, and she feared a change for the very worst. At last the door opened and she saw the man's slim figure emerge.

He saw her, too. He knew she would be there. Now his eyes had lost their usual cheerfulness. His brows were knitted, and he looked troubled. He shook his head as he came up.

"No improvement, my dear young lady," he said, in his crisp way.

"None? None at all?" The girl's face fell.

The man shook his head again.

"It is—quite extraordinary," he said thoughtfully. "She is comparatively young. I should say she was normally a—healthy woman. The operation was *absolutely* successful. She—she ought to be better—very much better. It almost seems—as if she doesn't want to recover."

"Oh, but," the girl cried impulsively, and broke off. All of a sudden the man's final remark became full of significance to her woman's mind.

"But—what?" inquired the man, with his amiable smile.

"I—I don't know," declared Phyllis lamely.

The man shook his head.

"That won't do," he said kindly. "You—you were thinking of something. Something suggested by my saying she seemed not to want to recover." His keen eyes were searching her strong, young face. "Listen, young lady," he went on, after a pause, while the girl felt as though he were reading her through and through. "We surgeons are frequently up against psychological forces in our patients which not infrequently undo all the good we attempt to do. Believe me, a skillful operation often fails by reason of the antagonistic forces I refer to. There is no physical reason that I can discover why Mrs. Hendrie should not recover. Her history—the history of her trouble—suggests that the psychological side has been instrumental in bringing about her—deplorable condition. I know no absolute facts, but I have reason to believe that her mental attitude is such as to retard, even destroy the chances of her recovery. Can you tell me? But I know you can."

The girl suddenly clasped and unclasped her hands. Her anxiety became almost painful. The waiting man saw that he was on a hot scent, and, like the clever man he was, refrained from pressing her.

Presently she looked up into his face with desperate eyes.

"Oh, Professor," she cried, "I've so—so wanted to say something to you before. But I've—I've been scared to. You see, a—a woman's so different from a man—and—Monica is—is a woman."

"Quite so."

Phyllis saw the smile which accompanied the surgeon's words, and her helpless groping suddenly passed. She stifled her nervousness and spoke quickly.

"Yes, I know. I'm silly," she cried. "But—maybe no one's told you. You see, it's not easy. Yes, Mrs. Hendrie's trouble I think was largely brought on by grief."

"Ah."

"I can't—can't tell you what it was. It's—it's hers. I have no right to tell it—even to you. Anyway," she went on quickly, "that grief is still with her—I expect. But it could be removed in—in a moment," she added quickly. "It would be so simple—if the excitement were——"

The surgeon's eyes lit.

"Good girl," he cried, in his quietly cordial fashion. "Now, how can the trouble be—removed?"

There was a quiet eagerness in the man's demand.

"Why—by letting Frank see her," Phyllis exclaimed. "By letting him see her and tell her that he is here—living here—here for good."

The man reached out, and taking one of the girl's hands patted it gently.

"Good girl," he said. "Now, just run off and bring this—great Frank. Tell him what you like, and then send him to me. He shall see Mrs. Hendrie—alone. And trust me to ask no questions. Maybe we shall find him a better doctor than any of us. You can leave the—excitement to me."

So it came about that the long, dreary period of waiting for improvement was suddenly brought to an end. Frank was the first person, except the nurses, allowed into the sick room, and he proved the tonic she needed.

That which passed between the two remained for them alone, but the effect upon Monica was miraculous. Improvement started from that moment, and Hinkling moved about the house, his dark eyes shining with the assurance of victory.

So, at last, bright days came again at Deep Willows. The influence of Monica's sudden move forward toward recovery was reflected in the entire household. Even Angus, austere, "grouchy," felt it, for the millionaire and his incessant work no longer obsessed him. Even he was glad of the breath-

ing space which the change in his employer's mood gave him.

The news traveled like lightning, and, two days later, when the great surgeon prepared for his long-delayed departure, everybody in the neighborhood, everybody in the house, down to the humblest capacity of service, knew that the mistress of Deep Willows was marching down the broad high road to health with no wavering or uncertain steps.

The millionaire accompanied the surgeon to Calford when the day came for departure, and during the long run in the automobile, in spite of his change of feelings, in spite of his great thankfulness that he was leaving Monica behind him basking in the companionship of the man and girl whom she regarded with all the affection of a mother, he was unusually silent.

The two men were lounging back in the open car. One, at least, was reveling in the sweet fresh air of the prairie lands as he sped upon the first stage of his journey back to the crowded streets of the city to which he belonged.

"I think it will be best to give her a complete change," the surgeon said, after a long, thoughtful silence. When I say complete I mean Europe, or travel about generally. Egypt, Palestine. Even China, or Japan. Take her completely out of herself, and every surrounding she's used to. There's nothing like comfortable travel in easy stages for a woman who's gone through what Mrs. Hendrie has."

"I'd thought of it," said the millionaire, settling himself more deeply on the wide seat.

The surgeon smiled.

"Then put it into practice," he returned.

Hendrie nodded. He was gazing out ahead over the long even trail. There was a grave look in his steady eyes.

"Say," he inquired, a moment later, "guess she's pretty strong—now? No danger of a relapse?"

"None whatever—I should say."

The little man's eyes were surveying the other speculatively.

"I'm—glad," said Hendrie, with a heavy sigh. "None, eh?"

"Humanly speaking—none."

Hendrie nodded with his eyes averted.

Presently he turned, and the two looked into each other's eyes, as men will who understand each other.

"She's got to hear some—news," Hendrie said, in his blunt fashion. "Likely it may knock her—hard."

The surgeon sat up.

"About that boy—Frank? Anything against him?"

Hendrie shook his head.

"No," he said. "It's—about me."

Professor Hinkling sat back in his seat with an assured smile.

"That's all right," he said easily. "It's only that boy matters—just now."

The evening sun was streaming in through the wide bow window of the boudoir, lighting up the delicate shades of color in the costly decorations with a suggestion of spring, rather than the mature days of early autumn which were already upon the world. There was hope in the aspect of the room, hope in the brilliancy of the sunlight, hope, too, engendered of the knowledge that here was no longer a sick room, but a delightful harmonious resting place where convalescence was to be converted into complete restoration to health.

A large lounge filled the space beneath the window where the patient might lie, or sit, drinking in the health-giving fragrance of the pure prairie air; where the sight of the wide blue heavens, with their robes of fleecy white, might well inspire the desire for perfect health; where the golden sun in all its glory might bathe the ailing body in its generous light, and drive back the grim shadows of sickness to the realms of darkness where they rightly belonged.

The room was littered with all those things which told of kindly hearts and loving hands. This temporary imprisonment must be made something more than tolerable. It must be made a memory for after life to look back upon, not with shuddering repulsion, but with delight at the thought of the generous love striving to bring happiness once more into an ailing life.

There were flowers, wonderful and rare; flowers which had traveled leagues and leagues to bring their message of hope of summer days to come, and delight the eye with their

wonders of delicate coloring, and ravish the senses with their subtle fragrance. There were books, too, books full of life's little romances to inspire that joy of thought and sympathy, for others less blessed in a struggling world. Fruits, delicious fruits from the most extravagant and luxurious corners of the earth. A hundred and one things there were waiting upon Monica's invalid whim, and, if need be, there would be a hundred and one more. The wealth of one of the world's rich men was at her feet. She was his idol. Nothing should be denied. No desire of hers should remain unfulfilled, if only it might contribute to the restoration of that perfect health from which she had so long been separated.

Hendrie was with her now as she reclined upon the lounge. She was still a shadow of her former self, but her eyes were alight with a wonderful peace of mind, and the joy of living. She was propped up with soft cushions, facing her husband, who was leaning forward in his chair with his hands clasped loosely, his elbows resting upon his parted knees.

He had been talking for a long time. He was still talking in a voice that was unusually subdued and gentle. He was carrying out his deliberate purpose to its last detail. He was telling her the story of that past; that past so full of passionate wrong-doing; so full of disgraceful, but strong manhood. He had shirked none of it. By not one fraction did he deviate from the bald truth, however ugly it might appear, in whatever painful light it might discover him. By not one touch of the brush of falsehood did he seek to gloss over the harsh surface of his own ruthless acts. It was a time when only truth could serve, and he had steeled his heart to abide by the result.

Just as he had always been the unyielding man, driving straight to the goal of purpose, so he was equally unyielding to the temptation to screen himself, equally strong in his frank self-accusing. He knew no middle course. There was no middle course for him. Such did not exist.

He had brought his story down to the final details of the recent happenings at Deep Willows.

"Mon," he said, gazing straight into the unwavering eyes he loved, and speaking with gentle earnestness, "you must judge me as you will. I tell you, cost me what it may, your judgment goes. The things I have done, and been, may

seem unforgivable to you. It would surely be a miracle if they did not. But before you sit in judgment on me you must know all you have meant to my life. You must know something of the depth of my love for you."

He thrust one hand into his coat pocket and withdrew the revolver it had contained for so many weeks now.

"See this gun?" he went on. "It's loaded in every chamber. No, don't be afraid, dear," he smiled as a look of trouble crept into his wife's eyes. "I had no thought of suicide. That is an act of cowardice; and, whatever my shortcomings, I am not afraid to face trouble when it comes along. But I want to let you see into my heart and mind, and know the man I am. That gun was meant for Austin Leyburn. The man I had wronged, and who was bent on revenge. His vengeance meant nothing to me personally. If he had succeeded in ruining me utterly I could still have laughed at him—so long as I had you. But all unconsciously he had made it possible that the help you needed, the help that was to save your precious life to me, might not be forthcoming. Had you died, I should have shot him dead. Furthermore, I should have been glad that my hand had crushed out his life. There is nothing more for me to say now, dear," he went on, after a pause. "You know me now as I am, or at least as I know myself to me. The future, my future is in your hands."

He sat up and returned the ominous weapon to his pocket, while Monica remained silent. Her eyes were no longer upon him. Their lids were lowered to hide the thought so busy behind them.

The man glanced at her. Illness had left its mark. Lines of suffering had drawn themselves about the corners of her beautiful mouth, where lines had not been before. Deep shadows were gathered about her eyes, and the hollowed cheeks displayed the ravages of ill-health.

But, even so, her beauty had in no wise departed. To this man, at least, there was no difference from the superb beauty once hers. It was the woman he loved, the soul and mind. Those things which he felt no ravages of illness could ever change.

He waited wordless. Of that which his heart might fear he gave no sign. It was his way.

At last Monica sighed. Then her eyes were slowly raised, and for one long, ardent moment she gazed upon the man whose blemishes were so many and whose virtues were so few, and yet whose manhood was far, far greater to her than that of any other she had ever known. She saw in him that wonderful thing which few women can look upon unmoved. She saw courage and manhood, and she bowed her woman's love of all the virtues to the instinct of her sex. She would not, could not judge. Nature had created in her an ardent woman's soul, full of the power of love, regardless of the right and wrong of her feelings. She had loved this man, and it was beyond her power to recall, or change those feelings. So her words came, thrilling with gratitude and love for the man who knew no other life than at her side.

"I'm glad, dear, so glad," she cried passionately. "Oh," she went on, with a ring of wonderful delight which carried joy into the man's stormy heart, and set his every sense thrilling, "I'm glad of it all. I'm glad I am here—you are near me. I'm glad that this wonderful evening sun is shining, and that my eyes can look upon it. I am glad that I am breathing this fresh, pure air, and that God has seen fit to let you drag me back from those dark and painful ways. But more than all I am glad of you, Alec, glad that I can reach out and touch you—so."

She thrust out one almost transparent hand, which was seized and gently clasped in both her husband's.

"It is good, dear, to feel your great, strong, warm hands in mine. It is good to know they are always with me, ready to fight for me, ready to caress me. Lift me up, dear—so."

The man reached out and supported her frail body, so that her fair head rested against his shoulder as he drew her to him.

"So, yes, it is good to have you with me," she went on happily. "Now kiss me, dear; kiss me, and tell me that the shadows are all gone by, that never again, so long as we live, shall we let others replace them. So—yes." She sighed in perfect contentment and happiness. "God has been very good to us—far, far better than either of us deserve."

So there fell a wonderful, perfect silence upon the room. The great sun beyond the window lolled heavily to his rest, and the shadows grew out of the remoter corners of the room.

Peace seemed to reign everywhere; a wonderful, perfect peace.

And after a while, a long, long while it seemed, the woman stirred in her husband's arms. Presently she looked up.

Her happy, wandering gaze had drifted to the window and beyond. There, in the darkening shadows of the skeleton woodlands, she beheld two figures strolling idly, hand in hand. The growing twilight left them clearly outlined against the blackened trees. The man's great figure towered over the slim woman by his side, who was still by no means dwarfed. Monica thrilled with delight as she beheld them. They were those whom she loved best in the world, next to this man at her side.

"Look, Alec," she cried. "Look there. They, too, have at last found perfect happiness. Soon—soon they will be launching their little craft upon the world's troubled waters. Soon they, too, will know the real meaning of life. We have learned together, dear, haven't we? And now—now we can sit by, and watch them, and help them launch their little boat. Beyond that we cannot go. Theirs it is to set their course and keep it. Theirs it is to put their hands to the tiller and weather every storm. And they are many—very, very, many, even for the most fortunate. God be with them."

The man was watching the idly wandering lovers with eyes of deep affection.

"He's a good boy," he said, in a tone that was full of paternal pride. "There's no bad streak in him, as there is in——" He sighed. "I'm glad of it. I want to wonder when I think what he's suffered at my hands. And after all these years he's come to me. It's good, Mon. It's good to think of.

"Yes," he went on, after a pause, "and what a girl for any man. I feel glad, so glad, I don't just know how to speak it. But I can do a lot. Say, when it comes to launching that boat, I don't guess they need to lay a hand to it. That's right up to me."

Monica gazed up into his strong face. Emotion was working behind that wonderful mask. She knew. But she would not let him know that she could read so deeply.

"How—how, shall you help to—launch that boat, dear?" she asked gently.

The man smiled, and his eyes were shining with generous impulse.

"How? Why, he comes into my business on a half share. You see, he's in my life on a half share already."

Monica's eyes thanked him. He wanted no words.

"And—little Phyllis—Phyl?" she asked with a tender inflection on the familiar abbreviation.

The man's smile broadened.

"Why, Phyl?" he cried. "For Phyl, whatever you say goes. Guess I'd like to hand her the house in Winnipeg as a present—on my own—though. She's just worth—everything."

Monica nodded.

"We have many debts to pay," she said. "There's that other, too."

"Other?" For a moment Hendrie looked at her in some doubt. Then he smiled again. "Ah—you mean—Angus."

"Yes, your beloved—Angus."

There was a note of gentle raillery in Monica's reply.

The man nodded.

"Sure," he said, with unmistakable conviction. Then he added: "The thing he's yearning for is this farm. He's just loved it years. Guess my attorney's fixing it over to him—right now."

The man's prodigal generosity left Monica speechless.

"He's worth it," he went on. "He's worth all I can do." Then he smiled. "You see, he's a feller whose rough exterior conceals a deal of what's worth while."

The woman's eyes were again turned toward the window, and the two figures beyond it. Their magnetism was irresistible.

"Those who possess most of—what is *really* worth while, often contrive to hide it under an exterior of denial," she said. Then, as an afterthought. "It's—it's the way of the strong."

The man agreed and his smile was almost humorous.

"Guess the strong folks often find themselves mighty short of the more—delicate virtues," he said, with a laugh. "Seems a pity—eh, Mon? Guess if things weren't that way,

we'd be having a world full of perfect men, hopping around like rabbits, and chasing glory by the light of their own halos."

Monica laughed, too, and finally smiled up into his face as she nestled closer to him.

"I don't think halos are becoming—anyway," she said. "I'm glad you don't wear—a halo."

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